

FOR THE TROUBLED NO. 1090

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 12, 1873,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Your wrath lies hard upon me, and You have afflicted me with all Your waves.”
Psalm 88:7.*

IT is the business of a shepherd not only to look after the happy ones among the sheep, but to seek after the sick of the flock, and to lay himself out right earnestly for their comfort and succor. I feel, therefore, that I do rightly when I this morning make it my special business to speak to such as are in trouble. Those of you who are happy and rejoicing in God, full of faith and assurance, can very well spare a discourse for your weaker brethren; you can be even glad and thankful to go without your portion, that those who are depressed in spirit may receive a double measure of the wine of consolation. Moreover, I am not sure that even the most joyous Christian is any the worse for remembering the days of darkness which are stealing on swiftly, “for they are many.” Just as the memories of our dying friends come over us like a cloud, and “dampen our brainless ardors,” so will the recollection that there are tribulations and afflictions in the world dampen our rejoicing, and prevent its degenerating into an idolatry of the things of time and sense. It is better for many reasons, to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting; the bitter cup has virtues in it which the wine cup never knew; wet your lips with it, young man, it will work you no ill. It may be, O you who are today brimming with happiness, that a little store of sacred cautions and consolations may prove no sore to you, but may by-and-by stand you in good stead. This morning's discourse upon sorrow may suggest a few thoughts to you which, being treasured up, shall ripen like summer fruit, and mellow by the time your winter shall come round.

But to our work: It is clear to all those who read the narratives of Scripture, or are acquainted with good men, that the best of God's servants may be brought into the very lowest estate. There is no promise of present prosperity appointed to true religion, so as to exclude adversity from believer's lives. As men, the people of God share the common lot of men, and what is that but trouble? Yes, there are some sorrows which are peculiar to Christians, some extra griefs of which they partake because they are believers, though these are more than balanced by those peculiar and bitter troubles which belong to the ungodly, and are engendered by their transgressions, from which the Christian is delivered. From the passage which is open before us, we learn that sons of God may be brought so low as to write and sing psalms which are sorrowful throughout, and have no fitting accompaniment but sighs and groans. They do not often do so; their songs are generally like those of David, which if they begin in the dust mount into the clear heavens before long; but sometimes, I say, saints are forced to sing such sorrowful ditties that from beginning to end there is not one note of joy. Yet even in their dreariest winter night, the saints have an aurora in their sky, and in this 88th Psalm, the dreariest of all psalms, there is a faint gleam in the first verse, like a star-ray falling upon its threshold—“O Jehovah, God of my salvation.” Heman retained his hold upon his God. It is not all darkness in a heart which can cry, “My God,” and the child of God, however low he may sink, still keeps hold upon his God. “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him,” is the resolution of his soul. Jehovah smites me, but He is my God. He frowns upon me, but He is my God. He tramples me into the very dust, and lays me in the lowest pit, as among the dead, yet He is still my God, and such will I call Him till I die. Even when He leaves me I will cry, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” Moreover, the believer in his worst time still continues to pray, and prays, perhaps, the more vigorously because of his sorrows. God's rod drives His children not from Him, but to Him. Our griefs are waves which wash us to the rock. This psalm is full of prayer, it is as much sweetened with supplication as it is salted with sorrow. It weeps like Niobe, but it is on bended knees and

from uplifted eyes. Now, while a man can pray he is never far from light; he is at the window, though perhaps, as yet the curtains are not drawn aside. The man who can pray has the clue in his hand by which to escape from the labyrinth of affliction. Like the trees in winter, we may say of the praying man, when his heart is greatly troubled, “His substance is in him, though he has lost his leaves.” Prayer is the soul’s breath, and if it breathes, it lives, and living, it will gather strength again. A man must have true and eternal life within him while he can continue to pray, and while there is such life there is assured hope. Still, the best child of God may be the greatest sufferer, and his sufferings may appear to be crushing, killing, and overwhelming; they may also be so very prolonged as to attend him all his days, and their bitterness may be intense—all of which and much more this mournful psalm teaches us.

Let us, in pursuit of our subject, first give *an exposition of the text*; and then, *a brief exposition of the benefits of trouble*.

I. I will endeavor, in a few observations, to EXPOUND THE TEXT.

In the first place, its strong language suggests the remark that *tried saints are very prone to overrate their afflictions*. I believe we all err in that direction, and are far too apt to say, “I am the man that has seen affliction.” The inspired man of God, who wrote our text, was touched with this common infirmity, for he overstates his case. Read his words, “Your wrath lies hard upon me.” I have no doubt Heman meant wrath in its worst sense. He believed that God was really angry with him, and wrathful with him, even as He is with the ungodly, but that was not true. As we shall have to show by-and-by, there is a very grave difference between the anger of God with His children and the anger of God with His enemies. And we do not think Heman sufficiently discerned that difference, even as we are afraid that many of God’s children even now forget it, and therefore fear that the Lord is punishing them according to strict Justice, and smiting them as though He were their executioner. Ah, if poor bewildered believers could but see it, they would learn that the very thing which they call wrath is only love in its own wise manner, seeking their highest good. Besides, the Psalmist says, “Your wrath *lies hard upon me*.” Ah, if Heman had known what it was to have God’s wrath lie hard on him, he would have withdrawn those words, for all the wrath that any man ever feels in this life is but as a laying on of God’s little finger. It is in the world to come that the wrath of God lies heavy on men. Then, when God puts forth His hand and presses with omnipotence upon soul and body to destroy them forever in hell, the ruined nature feels in its never-ending destruction what the power of God’s anger really is. Here the really sore pressure of God’s wrath is not known, and especially not known by a child of God. It is too strong a speech if we weigh it in the scales of sober truth. It outruns the fact, even though it was the most sorrowful living man that uttered it. Then Heman adds, “You have afflicted me with *all Your waves*,” as though he were a wreck with the sea breaking over him, and the whole ocean, and all the oceans, were running full against him as the only objective of their fury. His boat has been driven on shore, and all the breakers are rolling over him. One after another they leap upon him like wild beasts, hungry as wolves, eager as lions to devour him; it seemed to him that no wave turned aside, no billow spent its force elsewhere, but all the long line of breakers roared upon him, as the sole objective of their wrath. But it was not so. *All God’s waves have broken over no man, save only the Son of Man*. There are still some troubles which we have been spared, some woes unknown to us. Have we suffered all the diseases, which flesh is heir to? Are there not modes of pain from which our bodies have escaped? Are there not, also, some mental pangs which have not wrung our spirit? And what if we seem to have traversed the entire circle of bodily and mental misery, yet in our homes, households, or friendships, we have surely some comfort left, and therefore, from some rough billow we are screened. All God’s waves had not gone over you, O Heman, the woes of Job and Jeremiah were not yours. Among the living none can literally know what *all God’s waves* would be. They know, who are condemned to feel the blasts of His indignation, they know in the land of darkness and of everlasting hurricane; they know what all God’s waves and billows are—but we know not. The metaphor is good and admirable, and correct enough poetically, but as a statement of fact, it is strained. We are all apt to exaggerate our grief—I say this here as a general fact, those who are happy can bear to be told, but I would not vex the sick man with it while he is enduring the weight of his affliction. If he can calmly accept the suggestion of his own accord, it may do him good, but it would be

cruel to throw it at him. True as it is, I would not like to whisper it in any sufferer's ear, because it would not console, but grieve him. I have often marveled at the strange comfort persons offer you when they say, "Ah, there are others who suffer more than you do." Am I a demon then? Am I expected to rejoice at the news of other people's miseries? Far otherwise, I am pained to think there should be sharper smarts than mine; my sympathy increases my own woe. I can conceive of a fiend in torment finding solace in the belief that others are tortured with a yet fiercer flame, but surely such diabolical comfort should not be offered to Christians. It shows our deep depravity of heart, that we can extract comfort out of the miseries of others, and yet I am afraid we rightly judge human nature when we offer it water from that putrid well. There is, however, a form of comfort akin to it, but of far more legitimate origin, a consolation honorable and divine. There was ONE upon whom God's wrath pressed very sorely, ONE who was in truth afflicted with all God's waves, and that One is our brother, a man like ourselves, the dearest lover of our souls; and because He has known and suffered all this, He can sympathize with us this morning whatever tribulation may beat upon us. His passion is all over now, but not His compassion. He has borne the indignation of God, and turned it all away from us; the waves have lost their fury and spent their force on Him, and now He sits above the floods, yes, He sits King forever and ever. As we think of Him, the Crucified, our souls may not only derive consolation from His sympathy and powerful succor, but we may learn to look upon our trials with a calmer eye, and judge them more according to the true standard. In the presence of Christ's cross our own crosses are less colossal. Our thorns in the flesh are as nothing when laid side by side with the nails and spear.

But, secondly, let us remark that *saints do well to trace all their trials to their God*. Heman did so in the text: "*Your wrath lies hard upon me; You have afflicted me with all Your waves.*" He traces all his adversity to the Lord his God. It is God's wrath, they are God's waves that afflict him, and God makes them afflict him. Child of God, never forget this—all that you are suffering of any sort, or kind, comes to you from the divine hand. "Truly," you say, "my affliction arises from wicked men," yet remember that there is a predestination which, without soiling the fingers of the Infinitely Holy, nevertheless rules the motions of evil men as well as of holy angels. It were a dreary thing for us if there were no appointments of God's providence which concerned the ungodly; then the great mass of mankind would be entirely left to chance, and the godly might be crushed by them without hope. The Lord, without interfering with the freedom of their wills, rules and overrules, so that the ungodly are as a rod in His hand, with which He wisely scourges His children. Perhaps you will say that your trials have arisen not from the sins of others, but from your own sins, Even then I would have you penitently trace them to God. What, though the trouble springs out of the sin, yet it is God that has pointed the sorrow to follow the transgression, to act as a remedial agency for your spirit. Look not at the second cause, or, looking at it with deep regret, turn your eyes chiefly to your heavenly Father, and, "Hear you the rod and who has appointed it." The Lord sends upon us the evil as well as the good of this mortal life; His is the sun that cheers, and the frost that chills! His is the deep calm and His the fierce tornado. To dwell on second causes is frequently frivolous, a sort of solemn trifling. Men say of each affliction, "It might have been prevented *if* such-and-such had occurred. Perhaps if another physician had been called in, the dear child's life had still been spared; possibly if I had moved in such a direction in business I might not have been a loser." Who is to judge of what might have been? In endless conjectures we are lost and cruel to ourselves, we gather material for unnecessary griefs. Matters happened not so—then why conjecture what would have been had things been different? It is folly. You did your best, and it did not answer—why rebel? To fix the eyes upon the second cause will irritate the mind. We grow indignant with the more immediate agent of our grief, and so fail to submit ourselves to God. If you strike a dog, he will snap at the staff which hurts him, as if it were to blame. How doggish we sometimes are, when God is smiting us, we are snarling at His rod. Brother, forgive the man who injured you; his was the sin, forgive it, as you hope to be forgiven; but yours is the chastisement, and it comes from God, therefore endure it and ask for grace to profit by it. The more we get away from intermediate agents the better, for when we reach to God grace will make submission easy. When we know, "It is the Lord," we readily cry, "Let Him do what seems good to Him." As long as I trace my pain to accident, my bereavement to mistake,

my loss to another's wrong, my discomfort to an enemy, and so on, I am of the earth, earthy—and shall break my teeth with gravel. But when I rise to my God and see His hand at work, I grow calm; I have not a word of fretting, "I open not my mouth because You did it." David preferred to fall into the hands of God, and every believer knows that he feels safest and happiest when he recognizes that he is in the divine hands. Quibbling with man is poor work, but pleading with God brings help and comfort. "Cast your burden on the Lord," is a precept which will be easy to practice when you see that the burden originally came from God!

But now, thirdly, *afflicted children of God do well to have a keen eye to the wrath that mingles with their troubles.* "Your wrath lies hard upon me." There is Heman's first point. He does not mention the waves of affliction till he has first spoken of the wrath. We should labor to discover what the Lord means by smiting us—what He purposes by the chastisement and how far we can answer that purpose. We must use a keen eye to *clearly distinguish* things. There is anger and anger, wrath and wrath. God is never angry with His children in one sense, but He is in another. As men, we have all of us disobeyed the laws of God, and God stands in relationship to all of us as a judge. As a judge, He must execute upon us the penalties of His law, and He must, from the necessity of His nature, be angry with us for having broken that law. That concerns the entire human race. But the moment a man believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, his offenses are his offenses no longer—they are laid upon Christ Jesus, the substitute, and the anger goes with the sin. The anger of God towards the sins of believers has spent itself upon Christ. Christ has been punished in their place; the punishment due their sin has been borne by Jesus Christ. God forbid that the Judge of all the earth should ever be unjust; it would not be just for God to punish a believer for a sin which has been already laid upon Jesus Christ. Therefore the believer is altogether free from all liability to suffer the judicial anger of God, and all risk of receiving a punitive sentence from the Most High. The man is absolved—shall he be judged again? The man has paid the debt—shall he be brought a second time before the judge, as though he were still a debtor? Christ has stood for him in his place, and therefore he boldly asks, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." Now, then, the Christian takes up another position—he is adopted into the family of God; he or she has become God's child. He is under the law of God's house. There is in every house an economy, a law by which the children and servants are ruled. If the child of God breaks the law of the house, the Father will visit his offense with fatherly stripes—a very different kind of visitation from that of a judge. There are felons in prison today who, in a short time, will feel the lash on their bare backs, that is one thing; but yonder disobedient child is to receive a whipping from his father's hand, that is quite another thing. Wide as the poles asunder are the anger of a judge and the anger of a father. The father loves the child while he is angry, and is mainly angry for that very reason; if it were not his child, he would probably take no notice of fault; but because it is his own child who has spoken an untruth, or committed an act of disobedience, he feels he must chastise him because he loves him. This needs no further explanation. There is a righteous anger in God's heart towards guilty impenitent men; He feels none of that towards His people. He is their father and if they transgress, He will visit them with stripes, not as a legal punishment, since Christ has borne all that, but as a gentle paternal chastisement, that they may see their folly and repent of it, and awakened by His tender hand, they may turn unto their Father and amend their ways. Now, child of God, if you are suffering today in any way whatever, whether from the ills of poverty or bodily sickness, or depression of spirits, remember there is not a drop of the judicial anger of God in it all. You are not being punished for your sins as a judge punishes a culprit—never believe such false doctrine! It is clean contrary to the truth as it is in Jesus. Gospel doctrine tells us that our sins were numbered on the Great Scapegoat's head of old, and carried away once and for all, never to be charged against us again.

But we must use the eyes of our judgment in looking at our present affliction *to see and confess* how richly, as children, we deserve the rod. Go back to the time since you were converted, dear brother and sister, and consider—do you wonder that God has chastened you? Speaking for myself, I wonder that I have ever escaped the rod at any time. If I had been compelled to say, "All the day long have I been

plagued, and chastened every morning,” I should not have marveled, for my shortcomings are many. How ungrateful have we been, how unloving, and how unlovable, how false to our holiest vows, how unfaithful to our most sacred consecrations. Is there a single ordinance over which we have not sinned? Did we ever rise from our knees without having offended while at prayer? Did we ever get through a hymn without some wandering of mind or coldness of heart? Did we ever read a chapter which we might not have wept over, because we did not receive the truth in the love of it into our soul as we ought to have done? O, good Father, if we smart, richly do we deserve that we should yet smart again!

When you have confessed your sins, let me exhort you to use those same eyes zealously to *search out the particular sin* which has caused the present chastisement. “Oh,” says one, “I do not think I should ever find it out.” You might. Perhaps it lies at the very door. I do not wonder that some Christians suffer—I would wonder if they did not. I have seen them, for instance, neglect family prayer and other household duties, and their sons have grown up to dishonor them. If they cry out, “What an affliction,” we would not like to *say*, “Ah, but you might have expected it; you were the cause of it”—and such a saying would be true. When children have left the parental roof, and gone into sin, we have not been surprised when the father has been harsh, sour, and crabbed in temper. We did not expect to gather figs from thorns, or grapes from thistles. We have seen men whose only thought was, “Get money, get money,” and yet they have professed to be Christians. Such persons have been fretful and unhappy, but we have not been astonished. Would you have the Lord deal kindly with such surly ill-tempered persons? No, if they walk stubbornly with Him, He will show Himself stubborn to them. Brother, the roots of your troubles may run under your doorstep where your sin lies. Search and see.

But sometimes the cause of the chastisement lies further off. Every surgeon will tell you that there are diseases which become troublesome in the prime of life, or in old age, which may have been occasioned in youth by some wrong doing, or by accident—and the evil may have lain latent all those years. So may the sins of our youth bring upon us the sorrows of our riper years—faults and omissions of 20 years ago may scourge us today. I know it is so. If the fault may be of so great an age, it should lead us to more thorough search, and more frequent prayer. Bunyan tells us that Christian met with Apollyon, and had such a dark journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, because of slips he made when going down the hill into the Valley of Humiliation. It may be so with us. Perhaps when you were young, you were very untender towards persons of a sorrowful spirit; you are such yourself now—your harshness is visited upon you. It may be that when in better circumstances, you were known to look down upon the poor, and despise the needy—your pride is chastened now. Many a minister has helped to injure another by believing a bad report against him, and by-and-by he has himself been the victim of slander. “With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.” We have seen men who could ride the high horse among their fellow creatures, and speak very loftily, and when they have been brought very, very low, we have understood the riddle. God will visit His children’s transgressions. He will frequently let common sinners go on throughout life unrebuked—but not so His children. If you were going today, and saw a number of boys throwing stones and breaking windows, you might not interfere with them, but if you saw your own son among them, I will be bound you would fetch him out, and make him repent of it. If God sees sinners going on in their evil ways, He may not punish them *now*—He will deal out justice to them in another state. But if it is one of His own elect, He will be sure to make him rue the day. Perhaps the reason for your trouble may not be a sin committed, but a duty neglected. Search and see—and see where you have been guilty of omission. Is there a sacred ordinance which you have neglected, or a doctrine you have refused to believe?

Perhaps the chastisement may be sent by reason of a sin as yet undeveloped, some latent proneness to evil. The grief may be meant to unearth the sin that you may hunt it down. Have you any idea of what a devil you are by nature? None of us know what we are capable of if left by grace. We think we have a sweet temper, an amiable disposition! We shall see! We fall into provoking company, and are so teased and insulted, and so cleverly touched in our raw places, that we become mad with wrath—and our fine amiable temper vanishes in smoke, not without leaving black soot behind. Is it not a dreadful thing to be so stirred up? Yes it is, but if our hearts were pure, no sort of stirring would pollute them. Stir pure water

as long as you like, and no mud will rise. The evil is bad when seen, but it was quite as bad when not seen. It may be a great gain to a man to know what sin is in him, for then he will humble himself before his God, and begin to combat his propensities. If he had never seen the filth, he would never have swept the house! If he had never felt the pain, the disease would have lurked within, but now that he feels the pain, he will fly to the remedy. Sometimes, therefore, a trial may be sent that we may discern the sin which dwells in us, and may seek its destruction. What shall we do this morning if we are under the smiting of God's hand, but humble ourselves before Him, and go as guilty ones, desiring to confess most thoroughly, the particular sin which may have driven Him to chastise us, appealing to the precious blood of Jesus for pardon, and to the Holy Spirit for power to overcome our sin.

When you have so done, let me give one word of caution before I leave this point. Do not let us expect when we are in the trouble to perceive any immediate benefit resulting from it. I have tried, myself, when under sharp pain, to see whether I have grown a bit more resigned or more earnest in prayer, or more rapt in fellowship with God, and I confess I have never been able to see the slightest trace of improvement at such times, for pain distracts and scatters the thoughts. Remember that word, "Nevertheless, *afterwards* it yields the peaceable fruit of Righteousness." The gardener takes his knife and prunes the fruit trees to make them bring forth more fruit; his little child comes trudging at his heels and cries, "Father, I do not see that the fruit comes on the trees after you have cut them." No, dear child, it is not likely you would, but come round in a few months when the season of fruit has come, and then shall you see the golden apples which thank the knife! Graces which are meant to endure, require time for their production, and are not thrust forth and ripened in a night. Were they so soon ripe, they might be as speedily rotten.

II. Now, as time is failing me, I will take up the second part of my discourse and handle it with great brevity. I want to give a very short EXPOSITION OF THE BENEFITS OF TROUBLE. This is a great subject. Many a volume has been written upon it, and it might suffice to repeat the catalog of the benefits of trial, but I will not so detain you.

Severe trouble in a true believer has the effect of loosening the roots of his soul earthward and tightening the anchor-hold of his heart heavenward. How can he love the world which has become so dear to him? Why should he seek after grapes so bitter to his taste? Should he not now ask for the wings of a dove that he may fly away to his own dear country, and be at rest forever? Every mariner on the sea of life knows that when the soft zephyrs blow, men tempt the open sea with outspread sails, but when the black tempest comes howling from its den, they hurry with all speed to the haven. Afflictions clip our wings with regard to earthly things, so that we may not fly away from our dear Master's hands, but sit there and sing to Him! But the same afflictions make our wings grow with regard to heavenly things—we are feathered like eagles, we catch the soaring spirit, a thorn is in our nest and we spread our pinions towards the sun.

Affliction frequently opens truths to us, and opens us to the truth—I know not which of these two is the more difficult. Experience unlocks truths which otherwise were closed against us; many passages of Scripture will never be made clear by the commentator—they must be expounded by experience. Many a text is written in a secret ink which must be held to the fire of adversity to make it visible. I have heard that you see stars in a well when none are visible above ground, and I am sure you can discern many a starry truth when you are down in the deeps of trouble which would not be visible to you elsewhere. Besides, I said it opened us to the truth as well as the truth to us. We are superficial in our beliefs—we are often drenched with truth, and yet it runs off us like water from a marble slab! But affliction, as it were, plows us and sub-soils us, and opens up our hearts, so that into our innermost nature, the truth penetrates and soaks like rain into plowed land. Blessed is that man who receives the truth of God into his inmost self—he shall never lose it, but it shall be the life of his spirit.

Affliction, when sanctified by the Holy Spirit, brings much glory to God out of Christians, through their experience of the Lord's faithfulness to them. I delight to hear an aged Christian giving his own personal testimony of the Lord's goodness. Vividly upon my mind flashes an event of some 25 years ago; it is before me as if it had occurred yesterday, when I saw a venerable man of 80, gray and blind

with age, and heard him in simple accents, simple as the language of a child, tell how the Lord had led him and had dealt well with him, so that no good thing had failed of all that God had promised. He spoke as though he were a prophet, his years lending force to his words. But suppose he had never known a trial, what testimony could he have borne? Had he been lapped in luxury and never endured suffering, he might have stood there dumb and have been as useful as if he had never spoken. We must be tried, or we cannot magnify the faithful God who will not leave His people.

Again, affliction gives us, through grace, the inestimable privilege of conformity to the Lord Jesus. We pray to be like Christ, but how can we be, if we are not men of sorrows, and never become the acquaintance of grief? Like Christ, and yet never traverse through the vale of tears! Like Christ, and yet have all that heart could wish, and never bear the contradiction of sinners against yourself? Like Christ, and never say, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death”! O, sir, you know not what you ask. Have you said, “Let me sit at Your right hand in Your kingdom”? It cannot be granted to you, unless you will also drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism. A share of His sorrow must precede a share of His glory. O, if we are ever to be like Christ, to dwell with Him eternally, we may be well content to pass through much tribulation in order to attain to it.

Once more, our sufferings are of great service to us when God blesses them, for they help us to be useful to others. It must be a terrible thing for a man never to have suffered physical pain. You say, “I should like to be the man.” Ah, unless you had extraordinary grace, you would grow hard and cold—you would get to be a sort of cast-iron man, breaking other people with your touch. No, let my heart be tender, even be soft, if it must be softened by pain, for I would rather know how to bind up my fellow’s wounds. Let my eyes have a tear ready for my brother’s sorrows, even if, in order to that, I should have to shed 10,000 of my own. An escape from suffering would be an escape from the power to sympathize, and that were to be deplored beyond all things. Luther was right when he said affliction was the best book in the minister’s library. How can the man of God sympathize with the afflicted ones, if he knows nothing at all about their troubles? I remember a hard, miserly churl, who said that the minister ought to be very poor, so that he might have sympathy with the poor. I told him I thought he ought to have a turn at being very rich too, so that he might have sympathy with the very rich! And I suggested to him that perhaps, upon the whole, it would be handiest to keep him somewhere in the middle, that he might the more easily range over the experience of all classes. If the man of God, who is to minister to others, could be always robust, it might be, perhaps, a loss; if he could be always sickly, it might be equally so—but for the pastor to be able to range through all the places where the Lord allows His sheep to go, is doubtless, to the advantage of His flock. And what it is to ministers, it will be to each one of you, according to his calling, for the consolation of the people of God.

Be thankful then, dear brethren, be thankful for trouble! And above all, be thankful because it will soon be over, and we shall be in the land where these things will be spoken of with great joy. As soldiers show their scars and talk of battles, when they come at last to spend their old age in the country home, so shall we, in the dear land to which we are hastening, speak of the goodness and faithfulness of God which brought us through all the trials of the way. I would not like to stand in that white-robed host and hear it said, “These are they who come out of great tribulation, all except that one.” Would you like to be there to see yourself pointed at as the one saint who never knew a sorrow? O no, for you would be an alien in the midst of the sacred brotherhood. We will be content to share the battle, for we shall soon wear the crown and wave the palm.

I know that while I am preaching some of you have said, “Ah, these people of God have a hard time of it.” So have you. The ungodly do not escape from sorrow by their sin. I never heard of a man escaping from poverty through being a spendthrift, I never heard of a man who escaped from headache or heartache by drunkenness or from bodily pain by licentiousness. I have heard the opposite! And if there are griefs to the holy, there are others for you. Only mark this, you ungodly ones, mark this. For you these things work no good. You pervert them to mischief; but for the saints, they work eternal benefit. For you, your sorrows are punishments; for you, they are the first drops of the red hail that shall fall upon you forever. They are not so to the child of God. You are punished for your transgressions—he is not.

And let us tell you, too, that if this day you happen to be in peace, prosperity, plenty, and happiness—yet there is not one child of God here, in the very deeps of trouble, that would change places with you under any consideration whatever. He would sooner be God’s dog, and be kicked under the table, than be the devil’s darling and sit at the table with him. “Let God do as He pleases,” we say, “for while here, we believe our worst state to be better than your best.” Do you think we love God for what we get out of Him and for nothing else? Is that your notion of a Christian’s love to God? We read in Jeremiah of certain ones who said they would not leave off worshipping the Queen of Heaven, “For when,” they said, “we worshipped the Queen of Heaven, we had bread in plenty, but now we starve.” This is how the ungodly talk, and that is what the devil thought was Job’s case. Said he—“Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not set a hedge about him and all that he has?” The devil does not understand real love and affection, but the child of God can tell the devil to his face, that he loves God, even if He covers him with sores and sets him on the dunghill! And by God’s good help, he means to cling to God through troubles ten-fold heavier than those he has had to bear, should they come upon him. Is He not a blessed God? Yes, let the beds of our sickness ring with it—He is a blessed God. In the night watches, when we are weary, and our brain is hot and fevered, and our soul is distracted, we yet confess that He is a blessed God. Every ward of the hospital where believers are found should echo with that note. “A blessed God?” “Yes, that He is,” says the poor and needy here this morning, and so says all God’s poor throughout all the land. “A blessed God?” “Yes,” say His dying people, “as He slays us, we will bless His name. He loves us, and we love Him, and though all His waves go over us, and His wrath lies sorely upon us, we would not change with kings on their thrones if they are without the love of God.”

O, sinner, if God smites a child of His so heavily, He will smite you one day! And if those He loves are made to smart, what will He do with those who rebel against Him and hate Him? “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.” The Lord bless you and bring you into the bonds of His covenant, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 88.

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

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