

Why Do The Godly Suffer?

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A Sermon By Charles S. Price

In the Bible we find the answer to every question of life and the solution to every problem that confronts us as we travel the road between the cradle and the grave. We can have no doubt whatever regarding its inspiration. The fact that it is God-breathed is proved on every shining page and it scintillates with the glory of a presence Divine. What the lighthouse is to the mariner at sea the Bible is to the man that needs guidance through the turbulent storms of life. Precious book, Holy book. How we should treasure it and lean heavily upon its teachings as we are journeying home.

I presume that no more perplexing question ever has confronted the mind of mortal man than the one that is connected with our suffering. Why do the Godly suffer? We pray for the mountain top and God leads us into the valley. We pray for the sunshine and He sends the rain. We pray for skies that are clear and the armies of the clouds march across the highways of the heavens. We pray for the light and suddenly we find ourselves in the dark. Does God have a purpose in this? Is there a reason behind it all? What can be the motive Divine that is back of the situations in which we constantly find ourselves?

Thank God there is an answer. You will find it in the Word of God. Philosophers have searched in vain through the corridors of human knowledge and in the halls of human learning for an answer to this question but they have never produced one that would satisfy. Praise the Lord! There is - there is an answer.

In the development of the theme let us learn first of all one tremendously important fact. GOD HAS A PURPOSE IN EVERY LIFE. The vessel that is made of clay is not molded in EVERY an instant of time by the touch of the Master Potter's hand. There are many processes through which the clay must go before it can be a vessel fit and meet for the Master's use. The great musician who can play upon the strings of a broken life and make beautiful music, the music of a Christian character ring down the corridors of time, does not give to the world one grand chord and then let the strains die away in silence. He plays the symphonies and the melodies of heaven through life times that are long. I want you to rest, sweetly rest upon the assurance that you belong to Him and that He belongs to you. Do you remember the days when Satan came walking in the courts of heaven with the sons of God? In the conversation that ensued between Jehovah and Satan the Lord said, Have you considered my servant Job?" I like the use of that possessive pronoun My". "My" servant Job, "My" little children, "My" disciple Peter. Yes, my friends, you are His and He is yours. The very hairs of your head are all numbered. If it is true that not a sparrow falls to the ground

without His knowledge, it is also true that not a tear ever courses down the cheek but what He knows about it all.

What a wonderful thing it is to rise with the breaking of every day and by faith take hold of the hand Divine and say, "This day, Oh Lord, by faith I walk with Thee." "Mountain top or valley, sunshine or rain, Thou art with me, whether it be in the gray dawn of the early morning or in the light of the noon day sun, faith will whisper to my heart that Thou my Lord art near and when fast falls the eventide and the shadows have lengthened across the meadows of my life, even then, Oh Lord, Thou wilt still abide with me.

God, who led His own Son into Gethsemane but who wrought in Him and through Him His own perfect image, will never, never, never fail you in the test of life. So it is my friends I want you to learn that God HAS A PURPOSE IN YOUR LIFE. Sometimes we flinch beneath the blows of the sculptor; some times we instinctively shrink from the dark pigments that are put upon the canvas of our soul, but the Sculptor can see the finished masterpiece and the artist looks with the eye of the soul at the creation of his genius. So it is that God works with us that His perfect will might be done in each of our lives. So smile through your tears and shout in the midst of the night. If the cupboard is bare, the God that sent the ravens to Elijah has not forgotten you. If the cross is so heavy your shoulders are bowed, remember that the One who once called upon man to help Him carry His cross, will now help suffering man to bear his. Some one has said:

"All things work together for good when God and man work together harmoniously in weaving the web of holy character. The Divine Weaver and Designer supplies the long threads of the warp and the more brilliant cross threads of the woof, while man devotes his service and yields his will to weave after the Divine command. The threads of mercy and love, sorrow and joy, dark and bright, produce the dark background upon which the Rose of Sharon, the Christ of the Cross and the Lily of the Valley, the resurrected Redeemer, appears in all the glory of His power and the beauty of His holiness."

God has not forsaken us and the eye that watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. This should CHARGE OUR SOULS WITH FAITH. This is what makes Paul sing in the Philippian jail and Silas praise the Lord in the midnight hour. This is what will put the go-through into your heart and help you to stand in the evil day and then having done all to stand.

Come with me for a moment to an old ash heap outside the ruins of a village. There sits a man. His name is Job, and he is looking over the wreckage of nearly everything he has held dear. His home is gone, his asses are dead, his camels and his oxen and his sheep have been destroyed under the cruel blow of circumstances. One thing remains, HIS FAITH IN GOD. He writhes in his misery

and groans in his suffering. With a piece of old pot he scrapes the boils that cover him from head to foot. In front of him stands his wife looking with terror-stricken eyes at the pitiful object before her. No doubt under his breath he was whispering something about his faith in God and refusing to let go the hand that held his all during the years that are gone. His wife was amazed and mystified. God was unjust, cruel, merciless, to permit such a thing as this. She exclaimed in amazement, "Do you still retain your integrity? Do you still have faith in God? He has forsaken you, Job. Why not curse Him and then die? You will be out of your misery, away from your sorrows and death will bring surcease from all your pain."

Gently, but firmly, Job rebukes her. "You talk like a foolish woman," he said, and in spite of his suffering he gave her a glance that was filled with reproach. See him as he meditates a moment and then looking into the face of his wife, he asks a question that is so profound, that only people of spiritual discernment can understand it. "What," he exclaims, "shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?" What a question, but oh, what a glorious answer we find in the Bible.

WHY DO TESTS COME? Why does God permit the things to happen to us in life that we would shrink from and avoid? Why does He send us sometimes the things that we do not want? Let me remind you that we often want things that we do not need and perhaps more often we need things that we do not want. God can see the end from the beginning but we cannot. What a wonderful thing it is to trust Him for it all?

You will agree that we are taught in the Bible that we should JUDGE OURSELVES. Every Christian on the face of the earth ought to continually judge himself. We are taught that we should go on to perfection. There are high ideals of Christian experience to be attained. If we judge ourselves we shall not be judged. If we refuse to judge ourselves here we shall be judged hereafter, but no man can judge himself UNTIL HE KNOWS HIMSELF. No man can know himself until he is tested, until he is tried. Do you see it? In order for there to be self-judgment there has to be self-knowledge. In order for there to be self-knowledge there has to be testing. The only way to test a chain is to exert pressure on every one of its links and the possibility is you would not know which was the weakest link until the heavy weight tugs and pulls at it to the breaking point.

If God tests me it is because he loves me. If He tries me it is because He wants to make me something better tomorrow than I am today. I want a man I know to give you a testimony. Step up, Paul, stand here beside this pulpit and tell these people of the things you value in that great heart of yours and what things you treasure within the confines of your life. Listen! you can hear him testify.

"Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, rejoice. I glory in my infirmities. For these light afflictions which are but for a season are working something out in my life, they are working out for me a far more exceeding weight of glory. I want to praise the Lord for my stripes and my imprisonment, for everything, everything, everything that has happened to me. Tribulation works patience." What a glorious testimony this is from this indomitable soldier of the cross of Christ!

Be assured my friends that the hard places in your life are never punitive, they are remedial. God does not punish you for your sin or for your short-comings in the sense that you can atone for your transgression by your suffering, no, no, ten thousand times no. the only atonement in all the world is the shed blood of the Son of God, spilt upon Calvary as the atonement for sin.

"Could my tears for ever flow,
Could my zeal no respite know.
THESE FOR SIN CANNOT ATONE,
Thou can't save and thou alone."

When Peter with his broken heart was weeping outside the city wall he was not paying with those tears for his transgression. It was only because of his fall that Peter knew himself. A few hours before he had been so self-confident, so self-contained, so self-assured that his very words, "though all men be offended, yet will not I," proved to the Master that Peter DID NOT KNOW HIMSELF. Nobody on the face of the earth was any more surprised than Peter when he succumbed to the impulses of that evil moment and cursed and swore, but it was a turning point in the life of the dear old fisherman.

Not so very long ago I was kneeling in prayer by the side of a man who tore at my heart strings. As he told me his story with his head on my shoulder, he poured out the cup of his sorrow until I shared with him the burden of his crushed and bleeding heart. He admitted his transgression, he confessed his sin, but before I left him he said to me, "People say they are surprised at me falling into a trap like that, but let me tell you nobody in the world was more surprised than I was. I did not believe it possible that I could ever have done such a thing. Sometimes it seems to me now like a horrible dream, like a nightmare; but it proved to me I was not as strong AS I THOUGHT I WAS. The love of money gripped me in its clutches until I broke under that awful test." As I prayed with him and as our tears flowed together I left a piece of clay that had been marred in the hands of the Potter, but Jesus did not throw him away any more than He threw Peter away, who also failed his Lord in the hour of His trial. I wish we could remember that many, many times in life the tests come because God wants us to KNOW OURSELVES and then knowing ourselves we can be brought

to self-judgment.

What is meant by self-judgment? Everything that the term implies. Look yourself right in the heart and say: "This thing is wrong; this temper is not pleasing to God; this spirit of gossip is doing untold harm; this irritable nature is not like Jesus; this foolish pride; this earthly greed. I condemn these things in my flesh. I cry to the Lord for deliverance. I want them to come out. They must come out and BY GOD'S GRACE AND POWER, I will overcome." That is self-judgment, but when you begin to excuse yourself and talk about extenuating circumstances and say: "Well, other people talk to me why shouldn't I gossip a little if I want to," that is not self-judgment. You are side stepping the issue, you are evading the things that God wants you to do. Let me tell you something that I pray you will never forget. When God has revealed to you something in your life that is not pleasing to Him, then you should make up your mind that by His grace that thing has to come out. You will never be happy, you will never be blessed, you will never have the peace that passes understanding until you break and let God HAVE HIS WAY. Oh, my dear brother, why will you not trust Him? My sister, why will you not submit your all unto the Lord? the day will dawn when His promises will be vindicated in your heart and the shadows will flee from the corridors of your life.

Let us go back for just a moment to old Job sitting there on the ash heap. God SEEMS to have forsaken him. He SEEMS to be abandoned by the best friend he ever had. The three men who talked to him and offered words of counsel cannot bind up the wounds in his heart. He is crying out for God. He looks to the right and the Lord is not there, to the left, and the Lord is not there; frontwards and backwards, he goes on in his search but he cannot find Him, but somehow in the background of his mind he feels there is a Divine purpose in it all. "When He has tried me," declares Job, "I shall come forth as gold." He refuses to lose his integrity. He refuses to lose his faith in God. What a picture we find in the closing chapter. I can just imagine the Lord at last, after having spoken from heaven, looking down at his servant, Job, and saying, "Well, Job, are your boils all gone?" and Job looks up into the eyes of the Lord and says, "Yes, they are gone and I am feeling much better, Lord." "How many camels did you have, Job?" asks the Lord, and Job replies: "I had 3000 before they were all killed and taken away. The Lord says, " will give you 6,000, just double the number you had before. How many oxen did you have?" inquires the Lord. "500 yoke of oxen," says Job. "We shall double the number," replies the Lord, "and give unto you 1,000 yoke of oxen." How many sheep did you once possess?" I can see Job as he thinks a minute, for his flocks were many, and he says, "about 7,000 sheep were my possession, O Lord." The God of heaven replies: "I will give unto you 14,000 sheep." Yes, praise the Lord, he received DOUBLE OF ALL THAT HE POSSESSED BEFORE.

In conclusion let me close my eyes and just day-dream for a moment. Yes, I can see it, a picture I have drawn upon the canvas of my mind. I can see old Job. He is not sitting on the ash heap scraping himself with a piece of old pot listening to the discouraging voice of his own wife. No, that testing is all over. He is sitting on the broad veranda in front of his spacious house and around his feet are his great grandchildren looking with the eyes of babyhood. into the kindly face of the old patriarch. He gazes out over his broad acres and sees the camels grazing upon the hillside and listens to the bleating of the flocks in the meadow. He might be thinking of the days of his testing over a hundred years ago. His face is beautiful to behold, his countenance shines like the noonday sun. I do not believe I am stretching my imagination when I say if he were called upon to testify he could say of a truth as would another who knew how to trust God, many, many centuries later. "All things work together for good to them that love the Lord." Those ALL THINGS," my friends, mean the valley as well as the mountain top, the rain as well as the sunshine, the night as well as the day. So if the road has been dark through the valley and steep up the side of the mountain, keep on walking with God and you will see the vales of Beulah over on the other side.