

All Things Working Together For Good

'The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed toward us ... God Who searches the hearts of mankind knows what is in the mind of the Holy Spirit and knows what His intent is, because the Holy Spirit intercedes on behalf of God's people according to and in harmony with God's will. We are assured, God causes all things to work together, fitting into a plan for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Those whom He foreknew of whom He was aware and loved beforehand, He destined from the beginning to be moulded into the image of His Son so He might become the Firstborn among many believers. Those whom He foreordained He also called, and those whom He called He has justified, acquitted, made righteous, putting them into right standing with Himself. Those whom He justified, He has glorified, raising them to a heavenly dignity. What then can we say to all this? If God is on our side, who can be against us?' (Romans 8:18, 27 to 31). When these verses were written 2,000 years ago, they were written to comfort and encourage the Jewish disciples living in Rome when persecution of Jews and Christians was rife under the leadership of the wicked Roman Emperor Nero.

'You have forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with children, "My son, do not take lightly the chastening of the Lord nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him, for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and He scourges every son whom He receives." It is for discipline you endure. God deals with you as with children, for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are without discipline, of which all (believers) have been made partakers, you are illegitimate and not children of God. We had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us and we paid them respect. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live (forever)? Fathers, for a short time punished us as seemed good to them, but God punishes us for our profit so we may be partakers of His holiness. All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous, yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been chastised' (Hebrews 12:5 to 11).

These verses make it clear, all events that happen in our lives are for our good, for our profit and they will benefit someone and give us hope when often there seems to be no hope. Our sufferings are used by God to mould us into the image of Jesus. The Scriptures say God chastens, disciplines and scourges us. It is God's will for us to be made pure so indirectly, it is God's will for mankind to suffer while we are on earth but our sufferings are nothing compared to the amazing glory we will experience once we are in heaven. The apostles considered their sufferings a privilege because their sorrow could be compared to the sorrow Jesus suffered on the cross. 'We rejoice in our sufferings ... hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who was given to us' (Romans 5:3 & 5). 'The sufferings of Jesus abound to us so our comfort abounds through Him' (2 Corinthians 1:5). 'I rejoice in my sufferings' (Colossians 1:24). 'We see Jesus Who has been made a little lower than the holy angels because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour so by the grace of God He should taste death for everyone' (Hebrews 2:9). 'You are partakers of Jesus' sufferings so rejoice at the revelation of His glory so you may rejoice with exceeding joy ... I encourage the elders among you, as a fellow elder and an eyewitness of the sufferings of Jesus and who will share in the glory that will be revealed' (1 Peter 4:13; 5:1). Scripturally, God chastises us in this world for the purpose of giving us a better reward in heaven to a degree greater than our normal merits would ever deserve. All things, all chastisement, all suffering, all trials and all prayers that seem to go unanswered, all work together for good, but only for those who love God, who have answered the call of God and who live according to His purposes for our lives. The ungodly who do not love God do not have that blessing.

Suffering and trials will cause us to be transformed into God's image and will make us fit to live in heaven. We are forgiven and justified by the blood of Jesus, so our suffering is not because of sin but is for our eternal good. Sometimes difficult events end up being good for personal gain but more often, for the general good of others around us. The apostles suffered terrible persecution and trials but their sufferings helped to bring the Gospel message of salvation to the entire world and we are still benefiting from the tremendous effort of the apostles and the early church. There are many and varied negative occurrences in this world that can serve to bring us down emotionally. Our lives will not be perfect until we are in heaven so in the meantime we have to live with troubles and oppression (Psalm 34:17; John 16:33). We have all experienced negative situations, and disappointments like these can lead to deep hurt, feelings of hopelessness, anger towards God or depression. We will not always receive what we want even when there are clear promises in the Bible. Healing is a definite promise, yet we all know genuine believers who have suffered terribly with ill health. Those trials may appear to be broken promises but there is hope. When we eventually go to be with the Lord, we will be made whole and will never suffer illness again. Suffering may not be in the form of sickness it could be anything in any area of our lives. There are many terrible things that can happen to us so how can all these things work for our good? Even if we cannot see the good in our suffering, we have no choice but to trust the Lord and let it go. All we can do is accept what the Bible says and that is, our trials are nothing compared to the glory we will experience in heaven.

To encourage you we will repeat this: God chastises us in this world for the purpose of giving us a better reward in heaven to a degree greater than our normal merits would ever deserve and here is the Scriptural proof and promise of this. 'There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. A beggar named Lazarus lay down at his gate, full of sores and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores. When the beggar died he was carried away by the holy angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side' (Luke 16:19 to 23). This series of events tells us a lot. Lazarus was not healed, he had no help, he was hungry so obviously he was very poor, he was scorned by the wealthy man, had only dogs as companions and did not have an appropriate funeral. The wealthy man was healthy, very rich and was later buried meaning he had a funeral. The wealthy man did not bring Lazarus inside to feed him, clothe him, give him shelter nor did he show compassion. The wealthy man left Lazarus to live outside his gate and tossed crumbs to him like a dog. The Scriptures do not say what kind of life Lazarus had before his sufferings nor do we know how long his agony lasted. What the Bible does tell us, after Lazarus died his suffering was over and he received a wonderful, eternal heavenly life after this earthly life. He was not healed in this life but enjoyed healing afterwards. What seemed to be a hopeless situation turned out for the good of Lazarus. For us, his story gives us hope and encouragement because we know, when our time comes and we go to be with the Lord, we too will be healed, safe and we will also be able to fellowship with our Patriarch, Abraham and that is a very good thing.

We also need to submit our will to God's will. If we lose a loved one, it may be hard for those of us who are left behind but it is very good for the person who goes to be with the Lord, especially if they had been suffering ill health or pain. Instead of asking why the Lord took the person 'home' we should rejoice because their suffering is over forever. Even if the deceased person was young and healthy, their death could be because they have completed their time on earth so it was their time to go 'home'. It is God Who determines the length of time a person lives on earth and it is His prerogative to take a person home when He wants to, regardless of their age (Psalm 39:5). 'Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of one of His people' (Psalm 116:15). We need to align our will with His will no matter what the circumstances.

Sometimes our suffering benefits others. If we look at Joseph's life, he was happily living with his family, was adored by his doting father then aged seventeen (Genesis 37:2) he was suddenly betrayed by his older brothers. Joseph was torn away from his loving father, sold into slavery, forced away from his homeland to Egypt, a foreign country where he did not speak the language. While there he was unjustly accused of sexual assault when he was innocent, was sent to prison and suffered terribly while in prison. Through all of these negative events, Joseph trusted God and prospered in whatever he did so much, others took notice (Genesis 39:2 & 3; 41:38). On a personal level, God blessed Joseph with a wife, family and wealth then had him promoted to deputy to the Pharaoh (Genesis 41:39 to 45, 50 to 52). On a community level, Joseph's suffering led to the entire Hebrew population being saved from starvation due to the famine in their homeland (Genesis 45:5 to 8). Joseph was not the only family member to suffer when he was sold. His father Jacob was heartbroken when Joseph disappeared (Genesis 37:31 to 35). At any time after Joseph was sold, the Lord could have told Jacob where his beloved son was. They had a deep relationship and the Lord had often spoken directly to Jacob but for about twenty-seven years the Lord remained silent until after the wicked older brothers had seen Joseph, only then did the Lord confirm to Jacob, Joseph was alive and well (Genesis 46:2 to 4). Joseph was seventeen years old when he was sold, he spend thirteen years in slavery and prison before he was made deputy then there were seven years of plenty before the seven years of drought when the wicked brothers went to Egypt to buy food. Why did the Lord remain silent for so long? Because the Lord's plan was for Joseph to rescue the vast Hebrew family, so Joseph was needed in Egypt to accomplish God's will. Joseph's brothers intended to sell him as an evil deed but God turned their wickedness into the good of the vast Hebrew family (Genesis 50:20) and as we know, for the ultimate good of all mankind because Joseph's separation from his family became a pathway to our Saviour. Like Jesus, Joseph began his ministry at age thirty (Genesis 41:46; Luke 3:23).

Another example of suffering leading to good is the story of Moses. His parents Amram and Jochebed lived at a time when the wicked Pharaoh ordered all of the Hebrew baby boys to be killed but his edict was unsuccessful because the midwives refused to obey him (Exodus 1:15 to 22). Moses' mother Jochebed was Amram's aunt and his wife (Exodus 6:20). Jochebed saw Moses was a beautiful baby boy and hid him for three months. When she could no longer hide him, she made a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and with pitch to make it waterproof but it would have given off a terrible odour. She put Moses into it and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank. Neither Amram nor Jochebed watched to see what would happen to their baby. If they had been seen by the river they would surely have been killed and left Aaron, their three-year-old son an orphan. They were probably at home praying for their baby's life. It was Moses' sister Miriam who stood a distance away to see what would be done to him. The Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe at the river when she saw the basket and told a maid to go and fetch it. When she opened it and saw a

wailing Hebrew baby, she had compassion on him. Moses' sister Miriam offered to 'call a Hebrew woman to nurse him'. Miriam called her mother. The Pharaoh's daughter told Jochebed to, "Take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give you your wages." Jochebed took Moses and nursed him. When Moses was older she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter who named him Moses and he became her (adopted) son (Exodus 2:1 to 10). We will never know what Jochebed named her baby boy. It was the Pharaoh's daughter who named him Moses, which means 'Saved from water'. The princess knew Moses was a Hebrew baby so she gave him the Hebrew name 'Moshe'. Moses is the English translation of his name.

Amram and Jochebed would have been familiar with the prophecies the Lord gave to Abraham regarding the Hebrew people. They had faith and a strength and confidence only God could have given them. 'By faith Moses, when he was born was hidden for three months by his parents because they saw he was a beautiful child and they were not afraid of the Pharaoh's commandment. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill treatment with God's people than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a time' (Hebrews 11:23 to 25). Amram and Jochebed had faith in the promises of God and did not fear the edicts from the Pharaoh, believing God would save their son. After all, they already had a son Aaron who was then only three years old, alive and well. They also had their daughter Miriam who would have been about twelve years old then. The family must have prayed very hard and long before they surrendered Moses to the Nile River. They would have known when the Pharaoh's daughter went there but they were not sure what the outcome would be. Putting their faith in God in this situation would have taken a lot of prayer and trepidation. The emotional pain Moses' family would have gone through when they knew they could not hide him any longer would have been immense. Jochebed would have formed a close maternal bond with Moses in his first three months of life. Giving him up would have been heart wrenching. Getting him back and being paid to care for him would have been a wonderful relief and a blessing, goodness on a very personal level. Moses would have learned the ways of the Lord and the plight of the Hebrew people from his parents. This story reveals to us the personal good to come out of the wicked Pharaoh's edict, which ended up becoming a good, life saving event for the Jewish people and ultimately all of mankind. Moses' separation from his family became another pathway to our Saviour.

Joseph and Moses did not willingly leave their families to serve the Lord. Their circumstances were forced on them by the wickedness of others. God often uses circumstances beyond our control and turns those circumstances for our personal good and for the good of others. Our circumstances are not random nor are they pointless. They are all part of the Lord's plan for our lives. The Lord has told us, all of our circumstances have a purpose and all difficulties transform us into His likeness and image. Our obedience can help impact our communities and the world around us for good. Our obedience even in the most difficult circumstances can bring good to our lives and can take the Good News of the knowledge of God out to the community. The courageous people mentioned in this article were pathways to our Saviour Jesus. Our obedience can be a pathway for unsaved people to find their personal salvation through the blood and cross of Jesus. Through the courageous ministry of Jesus, we can see all things, including His terrible suffering and death then His glorious resurrection, work together for good and in His case, for the good of all mankind. 'We are assured, God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose' (Romans 8:28).

Amen and God bless you.

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