

Providence and Trials - #4

Grace and Contentment in Affliction

Introduction – “The choicest saints are born to troubles, as the sparks fly upwards (Job 5:7). Many are the troubles of the righteous (Psalm 34:19).... God, who is infinite in wisdom, and matchless in goodness, hath ordered troubles, yea, many troubles to come crowding in upon us on every side. As our mercies, so our crosses seldom come single; they usually come treading one upon the heels of another; they are like April showers, no sooner is one over, but another comes.” – T Brooks.

Simply put – the hard providences, those trials in your life, are no surprise to God. He decreed them all for you. And of course you can’t handle them by yourself – that’s part of the point.

Grace is an Answer (2 Cor 12:7-10) – Often we ask for release from a trial or affliction, and God does not take it away. That does not mean He has simply said ‘no’.

Humbled (v7) – Because of the heavenly visions God had granted Paul, God gave Him a ‘thorn’ to keep him from being exalted above measure.

Pleading (v8) – Nevertheless, Paul pleads with the Lord repeatedly for its removal.

Grace Sufficient (v9) – Grace is that mercy of God that will sustain you through the trial and accomplish great works in you because of the trial. Here, we see that in some fashion, Paul’s weakness is perfecting God’s strength in him.

Even Better (vv9-10) – And so, on the one hand, Paul would love to have the thorn removed. But, on the other hand, he realizes and even delights that this answer is a better answer when he considers who he is and will be ‘in Christ’.

Chastisement is Grace (Heb 12:1-11) – What were the saints doing in Chapter 11? They were looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith. And having seen them do this, we must run the same race.

Any Blood Yet? (vv3-4) – As bad as it might be for you, it is not yet as bad as it was for Christ. And you haven’t had to go to the stake yet.

Ordained Purpose (vv 5-8) – Not only that, but these chastisements have a purpose. They prove you are truly children of God. If you receive the chastening then you demonstrate it is good discipline, and if you do not, then you are not truly a son.

Illustration (vv9-11) – Fathers (the writer assumes, but that is for another sermon) discipline their children, and Christians attempt to do this imitating their heavenly Father as best they can. They are imperfect, and yet we respect them – how much more should we respect and expect fruit from a perfect heavenly Father, even as we endure the pain now?

Afflictions that Produce (2 Cor 4:16-18) – This bears repeating again and again. Your afflictions are so greatly outweighed by what God works out of them that they are relatively light and insignificant. God is not asking you to suffer for suffering’s sake, but for your own sake. He has your good in mind. If you do not believe His Word on this issue, you will not run the race, you will not endure the chastisement, and you will soon be greatly tempted to ‘curse God and die’. But remember – that is foolishness.

Complaining – And if you do not believe, you will become a complainer (1 Cor 10:10), a great sin with great consequences. It is amazing how much this sin is allowed in Christian circles. But it is a ‘mother-sin’ that gives birth to disobedience, ingratitude, impatience, distrust, rebellion, and cursing. It frankly charges God with folly, which is nothing less than blasphemy.

Mercy Like Manna (Lam 3:19-26) – This is so important to remember when you are tempted to worry about tomorrow (Matt 6:34). *Sufficient for the day is its own troubles.* But sufficient for the day is today’s mercy as well. Tomorrow’s grace comes tomorrow, not today. God’s mercies are new every morning, so go get them each day – plenty for this day.

In the same way, God only gives grace in apportionment to the particular trial you are facing today. Don’t look at someone else’s trials and think you couldn’t ever handle that. Of course you couldn’t. God hasn’t given you the grace to handle *that* trial.

Wise Contentment – In order to receive the discipline with gratitude, we must grow in wisdom. We must first learn how to give thanks in everything – it should be our ongoing habit. And then...

1 Tim 6:8 – “*And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.*” Honestly, some of us think we deserve so much more than we have received, and we think we can demand it of the Lord. And then we start thinking that ‘things’ bring contentment.

James 1:2 – “*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.*”- for all the reasons you have just heard.

Phil 4:11 – “*I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.*” Contentment comes to those who study it, seek it, and apply it. Contentment comes to those who know how to be ‘*conformed to His death*’ (Phil 3:10).

Jesus Christ: Wise and Content (Luke 22:41-44) – What a grand example of One who knew how to groan before the Lord and at the same time rest in His Father’s sovereign plan and purposes. He received grace and strength. He prayed until he bled. He refused to leave His trust anywhere but in His Father’s hand and will. And He was rewarded.