

3. Does God Send Trouble?

The answer that Scripture gives is simply: Yes! "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?" Amos 3, 6. "Thou hast stricken them, but they were not grieved; Thou hast

consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction." Jer. 5, 3.

Instances where God sent trouble abound in Scripture. God sent the Flood. God destroyed the Tower of Babel. God sent the plagues of Egypt. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

Even when God is not said to have directly and immediately caused a trouble, we know that all things are governed by God, and that therefore nothing can happen without His will or permission. "Not a sparrow falleth on the ground without your Father." No sickness, loss, or trouble can come into your life without the will of God.

Sin is the cause of all trouble in the world. God said to Adam: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." If Adam and Eve had not sinned, there would be no death, no sickness, no pain, no sorrow. But man's first disobedience, his eating of the fruit of that forbidden tree, brought death into this world and all our woe, together with the loss of Eden. It is the result of sin that God sends trouble.

God sometimes sends trouble directly and immediately as a punishment for a particular sin; for instance, the Egyptian plagues, the destruction of Sodom, the extermination of the tribes of Canaan.

More often the trouble comes indirectly as a consequence of sin. There is the case of Jacob. He complains bitterly: "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage." "Why, Jacob?" "Ah!" Jacob answers, "my sons have deceived me and brought shame upon my name, and my brother hated me, and I was an exile from my native land." "Yes, Jacob; still, is it surprising that Esau hated you when you cheated him; that your sons deceived you when they saw you deceive others?" Jacob's sins bore their fruit, and he had to harvest it. After David had committed his sins, was it surprising that his own children imitated him to his sorrow and shame?

Whosoever sins sets in motion terrible energies, which are incalculable and eternal in their results. A sin has often proved a crisis in a man's life, after which things were never again altogether the same in his life.

Nevertheless, we cannot always say that particular trouble is the result of special sin. Job's comforters were all wrong when they thought that Job was a sinner above others because he suffered more than others. As a matter of fact, Job was a better man than

any one of his three comforters. The disciples made the same mistake when they asked Jesus: "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" So far from being a mark of Cain and of special wickedness, trouble is sometimes a badge of Heaven's special favor; for we also read in the Scripture: "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

When trouble comes to you, therefore, search your life. Both you and I will find enough sin to make our affliction seem light indeed in comparison; and let us repent of our sins. When trouble comes to others, let us beware lest we think evil in our hearts against our neighbor, supposing that he was a sinner above others. It may be as in the case of Job that he is more righteous than his judges.

Though trouble is God's punishment for sin, yet by His grace and mercy God makes the very results of our own sin to become the vehicles of blessings to us; *for God's purpose in sending trouble is always to save.* God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Pet. 3, 9. God in His providence does not aim at making us comfortable in this world and time. It is of paramount importance, whether we grow rich or poor, whether we are healthy or sick, that we should come to a knowledge of our sin and need and accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. And it is chiefly through the discipline of sorrows that God reveals to us our need, which alone can bring us to the foot of the Cross. Many a man on his sick-bed or even death-bed, many a man standing in the wreckage of his fortune or at the casket of a loved one, has learned to know his need, and thus has found his Savior.

Unfortunately there are many whom the Lord afflicts with this beneficent purpose who do not regard it. They do not see God's hand, nor do they recognize His purpose. Others, again, after they have recovered from their illness or retrieved their fortune forget their fears and their promises, as well as their vows. They turn again to their former lives of indifference, and again become engrossed with the cares of this world, live for its pleasures and treasures, and in the end are lost. It is not God's fault. It is concerning such people that we read Jer. 5, 3: "Thou hast stricken them, but they were not grieved; Thou hast consumed them, but they refused to receive correction."

Others, again, murmur against God in their trouble and rebel.

How foolish and futile! In that way they only deprive themselves of the blessing without saving themselves the trouble.

But even after we have found our Savior and embraced His salvation in faith, our troubles are not at an end. When the artist has brought the rough and shapeless block of granite out of the quarry into his studio, he begins to work on it with hammer and chisel until by slow degrees the perfect image of beauty emerges from the rock. And so the Master Artist, God, after He has brought us out of our natural state into His kingdom and Church, begins to hew away with the hammer and chisel of discipline and sorrow until by and by the likeness of the character of our Lord Jesus Christ appears in our life. Death is the last blow of the hammer that perfects the image. Then "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

By the discipline of sorrow God *reveals us to ourselves*. A man has no more religion than he can command in the day of trouble; no more faith than he has when he is out of work and is spending his last dollar; no more patience than he shows under vexation. One affliction discloses a lack of faith, another an infirmity of temper, a third the power of some old habit. The railroad accidents which used to startle us have led to most of the improvements which render traveling by rail so comparatively safe in these days. Our troubles are intended by God to reveal to us our weakness, so that we might turn a vigilant eye upon them and fortify ourselves in those respects. We are to learn from defeat and troubles how finally to overcome and to gain the victory.

God sends us trouble to keep us from being wedded to this world and seeking all our good things here in this life.

A mother once brought her child to Gypsy Smith to shake hands with him, but the little fellow resolutely refused. Mr. Smith coaxed, and the mother threatened, and by and by the little fellow laid his fist into the evangelist's hand. But Mr. Smith wanted to shake hands, not fists, and so coaxing and threatening were resumed once more. At last the little lad broke down; the tears streaming down his cheeks, he opened his fist, and there fell into the hand of the evangelist the treasures of the boy, a few marbles and some colored glass.

So likewise do we hold our treasures in a firm grip. While we are willing to surrender ourselves to the Lord to be saved, we are always inclined to withhold from Him some special treasure. It is usually not until the Lord in His great mercy loosens our

hold and takes from our hands the treasures we hold so dear and we stand before Him at last with empty hands and perhaps weeping eyes that we lay our hands in His and say:—

Lead Thou me on
O'er moor and fen,
O'er crag and torrent,
Till the night is gone.

Especially is this true when our loved ones are taken from us; as our earthly home becomes lonesome and heaven becomes populous with our dear ones, we begin to realize that "Heaven Is My Home," and we look forward to the Father's house. Earth loses its charms; treasures and pleasures fade. We look more, and more wistfully, to that better country, even the heavenly.

Unbroken prosperity is ruinous. Therefore not many rich and great are saved, because their hearts are rooted in the earth. Abraham said to the rich man: "Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things." Perhaps if he had not had them, or not so much, or if they had been taken from him, he might have considered the better riches in God and found them. Having so many treasures, many do not seek the pearl without price.

Let us thank God for our troubles. How can we expect to be saved without them when "even the Son of Man was made perfect through suffering"? "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."
