

THE LAND OF MY AFFLICTION

Gen. 41:52 God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.

When I was speaking with the young people during the week, the subject we were discussing was *trust*. I realised very quickly I was ‘touching a raw nerve’, in fact, one of them told me so in front of the others. Has your trust ever been dealt a blow? I imagine it has.

The Oxford Dictionary defines *trust* as “a firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something”. Trust is that feeling you can have confidence in someone. It is about being able to believe people will be honest with you and behave in an appropriate manner. One of the most hurtful experiences is when someone you trust betrays you, disappoints you, and lets you down. It can be difficult to trust them again.

Widening the question out a little, have you ever felt as if the clouds hovering over you are never going to lift? ... You sometimes wonder how much more you can take?! And then you wonder if, as a Christian, you should be thinking like that. With such thoughts, are you not being a disappointment to God because you don’t seem to be trusting Him as you ought ... and *that* makes you feel worse!

Does it happen to Christians? Yes, it *does* happen to Christians. But what does it mean when I’m feeling like that? Can a Christian *be* so low? ... Yes, and Scripture is full of testimonies of faithful men and women who faced despair.

How does it happen? It often comes upon you when you’re not expecting it. Granted, your life might have been continually blighted with problems, and none of them necessarily of your own making. For the most of us though, it ‘creeps up’ on us when we are not necessarily expecting it. ... Joseph wasn’t expecting his brothers to deal with him as they did, - he wasn’t expecting them to hate him so much they would plan how to kill him, or to throw him in a pit, or to sell him off to the slave-traders. Neither, in Egypt, was he expecting his master’s wife to accuse him and he would end up in a prison.

Another example is Jeremiah the priest, the son of a priest. His daily routine was ‘similar’ from one day to the next until the Lord called him, **Jer. 1:5** *Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.* ... To which Jeremiah recoiled in his answer, **6** *Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.* ... However, his world was about to change when the Lord told him, **8** *Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee.* ... “afraid” and “deliver thee”, - those were *immediately* ominous terms.

Jeremiah became a mighty prophet of God, at Whose command he had to stand up against the authorities in Jerusalem, including the king. His calling became so difficult he plummeted into despair and he accused the Lord of deceiving him, - that is what Satan had whispered in his ear, **Jer. 20:7** O LORD, thou hast deceived me [cf. *Gen. 3:13 And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat*], and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. ... Lord, I've become a fool! People are mocking me, and I'm a laughing-stock! ... Would you dare say that to the Lord, or even think it?! In his despair, he continued, **14** Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. **15** Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad. **16** And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide; **17** Because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me. **18** Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame? ... Lord, I wish I wasn't here!

And in the New Testament, what about the example of Paul? Paul was a great giant of the faith. ... Who more than him served the Lord with such enthusiasm and faithfulness? God had taken him out of his old life to tell the world about Jesus and yet, he often faced abuse for doing so, - he was vilified, whipped, imprisoned. ... He was in Ephesus for two years and a great revival broke out, **Acts 19:20** So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. And during that time the Lord also worked great miracles through him, - demons were cast out, the lame and the sick were healed (vv.11,12).

Indeed, his work for the Lord in Ephesus was so incredible, the converts gathered up all their occult books and the implements they used for idol-worship, - 50,000 pieces of silver's worth, - and burned them in a massive bonfire in the city square. However, such was its impact on the business community whose livelihood depended on the worship of these idols, there was an uproar against Paul, and the uproar caused a riot. They caught hold of Paul and dragged him into a theatre where he was forced to defend himself. ... Do you get the picture? Paul had given two years of his life to the Lord's service in Ephesus, and he had seen a mighty move of God, but it changed because of wickedness, he wrote, **II Cor. 1:8** For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble [*θλίψις, distress, tribulation*] which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we *despaired* even of life.

Ephesus wasn't an isolated occasion ... Another example was when he first went to Corinth. Within a few weeks he wanted the Lord to take him out because it was so hard, but it wasn't to be so for the Lord told him, **Acts 18:9** *Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: ¹⁰ For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.* ... Paul, I have a work for you to do in Corinth, and despite what you're facing, I want you to stay there. ... But, you might be asking, "Why would the Lord allow such a faithful servant to suffer so much opposition? Why did the great saints have to battle with disappointments and discouragements and depression, - inwardly and outwardly?" ... Why couldn't they be taken somewhere productive, where their sincere efforts would be rewarded?!

You might say, a Christian shouldn't have to face such battles in life ... but why not? My uncle owned a successful construction business. Early one morning, at about 1.30, he was getting up from the table where he was having his supper ... he fell, was paralysed from the neck down, and spent most of the next two years in hospitals. He was only sixty-six years old when he died, - not of his fall, - but of cancer. He was a Christian. He was told on the Thursday he had cancer, and he was dead by the weekend. When a friend said to him, "Why is it all happening to you?" He simply answered, "Why not?" ... As long as we are in this world, we face its problems like everyone else. ... We have to contend with its fears and anxieties. ... When we are saved, the Lord doesn't put us in a bubble and keep us away from life's troubles, but what He *does* do is He never leaves us nor forsakes us, no matter *what* circumstances come our way, **Is. 43:1** *Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. ² When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.*

How can that be? Paul answers, **II Cor. 4:16** *For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; ¹⁸ While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.* ... That is how the Christian contends with the difficult issues in this life. ... The great saints of the Bible spoke truthfully and candidly about their troubles and their feelings, - they didn't cover them over or dress them up. They honestly acknowledged the reality of life for there is no point in denying it.

Isn't it true that when the devil comes to you at times when you are 'down low', he 'spins you a yarn' about how inadequate you are? He has noticed you have

been ‘flagging’, and he comes and loads more pressures on you. They become so weighty and wearisome, they wear you down and you feel you are being pulled *under*, deeper into despair. He comes with discouragements and you wonder how you will ever escape! ... You know, of course, you are secure in your salvation, but it’s as if you are ‘falling’. And it seems your peace is gone, you are plagued by restlessness, and you don’t feel worthy to belong to God.

It is a genuine spiritual condition. It doesn’t necessarily mean you have done anything bad, or you have wandered away from the Lord ... but something which you can hardly explain has come in and has cast you into despair. ... If that *is* a description of you, take heart for that was how many of the giants of our faith sometimes felt. For instance, it’s how Elijah felt when he pleaded with the Lord to take his life.

But even through such dark periods, God never abandons us for His purpose is to strengthen our trust in Him, **I Cor. 10:13** God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted [*tested, tried*] above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. ... He is the same God Who has promised, **Heb. 13:5** I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee ... He is the God upon Whom you can rely for everything.

Some people tell you the way to beat the afflictions is to resist the devil and he will flee from you, but that is not right ... he won’t flee from you. He is not afraid of you. If you were to resist him, he would laugh at you, and he would pile greater heaps of misery upon you. You and I cannot resist him in our strength, but here is how we *can* resist him... you start by doing what is commanded *at the beginning* of the verse, **James 4:7** *Submit yourselves therefore to God* that is where you begin, and *then* Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ... Submission, *then* resistance, not in your *own* strength, but in the *Lord’s* strength. ... To stand up to the devil, you must first kneel before the Lord, otherwise you will fail. ... Satan cannot break what belongs to God.

Don’t *underestimate* the devil, but don’t *overestimate* him either for he can only touch you where and when God allows him ... and when the Lord allows him, it’s always for God’s higher purpose of perfecting you in your faith, **Job 23:14** For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him ... **10** For He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. ... The devil is roaming like a roaring lion (I Peter 5:8), but he is under God’s discipline and authority, - Satan doesn’t have ‘free rein’, he cannot do what he likes! For example, he couldn’t lay one single disaster at Job’s door until the Lord allowed it, for that is what the devil acknowledged, **Job 1:10** Hast not thou made an

hedge about him. ... And when the Lord *did* allow him, Satan was told he was limited in what he could do to Job, **2:6** *he is in thine hand; but save his life.*

Job's troubles were beyond description but through them all, the Lord demonstrated Job's faithfulness and devotion (Job 1:8) ... and in the last chapter the Lord rewarded it, **Job 42:10** *the LORD turned the captivity of Job ... also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.* And when he died, **17** *being old and full of days ... the Lord remained with him through all his troubles.*

The devil would want you to think you're the only Christian facing the battles ... but you're not! You are not the only one 'in his sights' for he is the enemy of all God's people. And don't listen to him when he tells you how badly you're doing and how inadequate you are as a child of God. Don't allow him to spin his yarns! Instead, when you find it hard to keep going, look at the example of Jesus and how *He* continued on a far worse road than you and I will ever be called to travel ... and remember the words of Paul, **II Cor. 12:9** *And he [the Lord Jesus] said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. ... When I am weak, He is strong. When I think I'm about to fall, Ps. 63:8 thy right hand upholdeth me. Through every circumstance we have His promise, Ps. 55:18 He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me ... [for] Ps. 18:2 The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust.*

You and I don't need to run anywhere because we are safe in the arms of Jesus, - "... the Rock that is higher than I, [to which] My soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly". ... I wouldn't insult your intelligence by pretending it's easy, but when you *are* 'needing' ... allow the Saviour to help you take the strain ... Perhaps there will come a day when He will show you *why* you had to suffer, but until then, keep going on ...

*I'm in His Hands. I'm in His hands:
What'er the future holds, I'm in His Hands.
The days I cannot see have all been planned for me:
His way is best you see: I'm in His hands."*

It's true for in Him our confidence is complete ... and when all our trials are over, those words in Gen. 41:52 will be our final testimony, **Gen. 41:52** *God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.*