

THE PURPOSE OF GOD IN OUR AFFLICTION

Psalm 119:65-72

Intro: When most of us were first saved, we had a very different idea of the Christian life than we do now. It is not that we would go back to the old life for a minute, but we are not looking at the world and life in general through rose-colored glasses. At first it seemed that prayer was answered more readily, but now we have a whole list of prayer requests that have not been answered. Chief among these are the spiritual problems which we and others have, as well as unsaved people whose salvation we have been praying about.

Here in stanza 9 the psalmist has introduced a word which we have not had in the previous stanzas. We have it in verse 67, and again in verse 71. It is found only four more times in this Psalm, in verses 50, 75, 107, and 153. These are not the only times that the psalmist mentions troubles of any kind, but the only times that he used this particular word. What does it mean? Basically it means anything that humbles us and bows us down, oppressing us. To be afflicted is to run into some problem that we were not expecting, and which causes us grief.

The psalmist mentions one in verse 69 which is one which David mentioned quite often in other Psalms: “The proud have forged a lie against me.” In verse 61 he mentioned another: “The bands of the wicked have robbed me.” We could add to this verse 53 which is a trial of a different kind. In verse 51, “The proud have had me greatly in derision.” In verse 42 he mentioned those who reproached him. And you will find many others throughout this Psalm. When you read both the Old and New Testaments you discover that the people of God in those days had a much harder time than most of us have had. Perhaps one reason for that is we have become more skillful in not offending people with our faith. But that is not to our credit. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). The Lord Jesus told His disciples just before He went to the Cross, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). Much of Scripture instructs us that we will be persecuted, why we are persecuted, and how to deal with persecution. We are not intentionally to be offensive to people. Obnoxious Christians are a discredit to our Savior. But if we are going to live for the Lord we are going to experience affliction and trouble and persecution in various forms. The world is definitely going in one direction, and we are going in another. So it is

inevitable that we are going to experience the consequences of the way the Lord has called upon us to live.

However, we believe in the sovereignty of God, don't we? We believe that nothing touches us but what it has the approval of the Lord. And this even includes those times when we are seeking to trust Him to lead us, when we are seeking to do His will. We also believe that God has purposes in trials that come our way. And this is what the psalmist has emphasized in the stanza that we are considering tonight.

Notice what we can call purpose #1 in verse 67: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept Thy word."

Remember that Psalm 119 is a Psalm of the Word of God. It is all about the Word. One thing that affliction does for us is to show us our weaknesses, and consequently our need for the Word. We have all sung that hymn which has the words, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love." We have all struggled with that, and the Lord knows that we do. So he sends trouble; he sends afflictions so that we will turn to His Word (because we have nothing else that we can do). But in the Word we find strength to be able to stand against temptation. That is the whole point of Ephesians 6:10-18, isn't it?

The Psalmist also gives us another purpose, #2, in verse 71. Now God has many reasons for allowing trials to come into our lives, so this stanza is not exhaustive. But it is very basic. Here the Psalmist mentioned that this was one way the Lord had of giving him understanding in the Word. In fact, you can see that trials are often given by the Lord, not because we have asked for them, but because trials are involved in the way God answers our prayers. Twice in this stanza, in verses 66 and 68, the Psalmist asks the Lord to teach him the Word. I am sure that we have all had the experience that when we have been seeking the Lord's blessing in a trial, some verse, or some passage in the Bible, has really become the answer to our need at that time. Trials make us pay more attention to our Bible reading. They make us more aware of the promises of God. Trials make us more conscious of God Himself.

And so what did the Psalmist say about his afflictions? He said, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Now it is not normal for us to talk like that, but it is often the afflictions that are high on our list when we are thinking of things that we need to be thankful for. Perhaps these

are words that have come from you lips when you have seen how God has used a certain trial in your life.

But now in the context of these afflictions, let us notice what else the psalmist had to say with reference to his afflictions, and for this we go back to the beginning of the Psalm.

In verse 65 we see that the psalmist realized that all of God's dealings with him had been good (as he eventually says in ver 71) and that God never acts in a way that is contrary to His Word. If we want to know the ways of God, which is essential for all of us who seek to walk with the Lord, we must go to His Word. That is one reason it is so tragic that there is so little Bible teaching in churches today. With all that we have, we don't have too much. How can you get too much of the Word?

But notice another thing that the Psalmist said in verse 66. The trials that the Lord had brought into his life had strengthened his faith, and in particular in the commandments of the Lord. One reason for our disobedience is that we are inclined to pass judgment on what the Word says about the way the Lord wants us to live. Commandments are to be obeyed, but we have to believe them, to trust them, before we will obey them. Trials show us how right the commandments of Scripture are. See what the psalmist said in the very next verse.

In verse 68 we see that our trials not only make the Word of God more precious to us, but they enable us to see *that God is good, and that what He does is good*. And this is always true. And we always love God for His goodness to us. But we must remember that what He does, even in our afflictions, is good (although it may not seem that way at the time) because He is good. And how wonderful it is that His disciplines in our lives are added proof of His love for us.

In verses 69 and 70 the psalmist refers to the other ingredient that there is in life, people who are characterized by pride and lying, or deception. The Devil's warfare against the human race began with a lie, a lie about God. And it has proven to be a strong weapon in Satan's arsenal from that day until this, and will continue to be to the end of time.

The wicked are as far as grease. They are totally insensible to God and to His Word. Cf. Isa. 6:10. Also Psa. 73:7. They are foolish, satisfied with their pleasures, utterly repulsed by the Word of God. They are sure that

they are right and totally unconscious of the fact that they are completely wrong.

As the stanza ends we see what the psalmist really considers as the greatest of all possessions in life. The Word of God was, as he said, “better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.”

If you love the Word, and love obeying the Word, more than you love money, you are truly a strange person in this world. Money is essential, but the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. We need money in order to pay our bills and buy our food, homes, and clothing, but we didn't bring any money with us when we came into this world, and we are not going to take any of it when we leave. On the other hand, the Word of our God abides forever. Heaven and earth will pass away, but not the Word of God.

The world looks upon afflictions and troubles as that which must be avoided at all cost. Those of us who believe in God and in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, don't ask from trouble, but we know when it comes that it has had to the approval of God before it has gotten to us, that it is evidence of His love for us, and that God is going to make it good for us.

We never know what a day will bring forth, but God does! He has ordered our steps. And so we learn through our trials not only to trust Him, but also to praise Him Who is preparing us not only for life here below, but for those greater things that await us in heaven above. So let us learn to look beyond the trials of life to the One Who has ordered them for us. Then, and only then, can we have peace, and then, and only then, can we profit from those experiences which are sent to us by God, not to destroy us, but to make us more holy, more prepared for heaven.