

104 When the Going gets Tough ...

Life is rarely dull! We never know what lies round the next corner, or what tomorrow will bring. There are times, thank God, of great joy, progress, happiness, peace, fulfilment and all the rest of it. And then there are those other times, when it seems that anything that could possibly go wrong really does go wrong! - sometimes even despite our prayers to the Lord to "lend us a hand" as we cope with the darker, harder times.

Many of the Psalms reflect this instinct we have to cry out to the Lord when the "going gets tough". Our prayers become briefer, and rather more to the point! How easy it is for us to get into a state of thinking, "And just what do you think you are playing at Lord, in letting all these problems happen to me?".

In such times, we do well to bear in mind a few "home truths". First, it is a great help to remember that all that is happening is happening only by the Lord's allowance. We recall how poor Job suffered so greatly simply because Satan had asked permission of the Lord to "have a go at him". Satan's expectation was that Job's faith and righteousness (Job 1.1, 8) would quickly crumple if his life took a turn for the worse (1. 9-11). Crucially, we see how the Lord said to Satan words to the effect of - "Go on then, let's wait and see" (1.12).

Second, because tough times only come our way at all because the Lord has given permission, we can know that He has only given that permission for a reason. Because of the Lord's character, we know that that reason must be a good reason, which will make this time of trial worth it. His desire is to use this time of difficulty for His own gracious purposes, perhaps regarding us, others, and Himself. In other words, trials are indicators of "God at work" rather than "God isn't bothered". (See for example Roman 5.2b-5 / James 1.2-4 / I Peter 1.3-9).

Third, we can thank the Lord that the trials we encounter, like everything else in creation, are actually "within the Lord", rather than the Lord being within the trials - a marked difference of approach. For in reality the trials are tiny when compared with the infinite Lord of creation. Which would we prefer? Either the viewpoint of a massive problem, with our asking the Lord to come into this massive problem with us; or the far better and truer viewpoint of a massive Lord, into whose massive hands we yield this tiny problem?!

Fourth, in some cases we may need to confess and repent for any part we may have played in bringing such trials into being in the first place; for we are not always the innocent victims of circumstances we sometimes like to think! Getting us to acknowledge our possible responsibility could well be part of the Lord's purposes in allowing the problem to arise at all, for He is always keen to see His redeemed children "growing up" in our knowledge of Him and of ourselves.

When the trials come, as they do, for they are part and parcel of Christian discipleship (John 16.33), we can react with thankfulness and even anticipation: "Lord thank you that you are using these trials for your gracious purposes. Please grant me understanding of the part I should be playing in all this....". That part will involve humble use of the Lord's resources and of our own God-given gifts, so the whole journey through any time of trial turns out to be God-surrendered, God-pleasing, and God-glorifying.

So whether our path be rough or smooth, may our cry always be - "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit!".

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