

## **524 But be of good cheer**

On our Christian pilgrimage together we will all encounter at times two broad strands of Christian experience. The one strand is joyful - blessings, happiness, success, progress, peace - when all is going "just fine"! The other strand is rather different, with trials, sufferings, setbacks, fears and doubts. Our questions mount up – "Why, O Lord? Why me? Why us? Where are you? Why have you turned your back on us?" – as we find in many of the Psalms, for instance in Psalm 31: "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble ... My life is spent with grief and my years with sighing ... I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel" (from vv.9-12, KJV). These days the list of such afflictions is long and familiar, and can clearly apply to anyone, with no "magic carpet of exemption" for the Christ-redeemed: illness and disability; shock and strife; divorce and bereavement; anger, guilt and fear; poverty and unemployment; persecution and discrimination; and so on.

As the Lord's people it is particularly easy for us to cry "Foul!" in the Lord's direction when life is tough for us for whatever reasons, for such trials may seem to make a mockery of His numerous promises of loving concern for our all-round welfare, such as: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (from Joshua 1.5 and quoted in Hebrews 13.5).

As always, we find the Lord's comforts in His Word. For a start, He has told us that because of human sin, God's perfect creation is messed up; Satan and his cronies are beavering away; "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (with the one Exception, Hebrews 4.14-16 / II Corinthians 5.21); and all in Christ are now engaged in this spiritual warfare (egs., Genesis 1.31a; 3.1-24 / Isaiah 14.12-15 / Romans 3.23 / Ephesians 6.10-18). In the Gospels we see how Jesus frequently encountered satanic activity and dealt with it accordingly. For us too, some of our trials will arise from this deep, constant, spiritual conflict which is hidden yet all-too-real. Our Scripture-based response is straightforward: prayerfully recognise what is going on, and why, preferably with others rather than just on our own; and put that "whole armour of God" to good use, standing under the Name of the Risen Lord Jesus, and claiming the victorious power of His shed blood.

Other trials may be the consequence of our own follies or sinfulness in whatever way, which the Lord has allowed so as to teach us some necessary lessons. For instance after David's adultery with Bathsheba and his subsequent "dealing with" Uriah her husband, "the Lord struck

the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick" (II Samuel 12.15). David was in anguish (vv.16-17), but "on the seventh day ... the child died". David experienced this suffering solely because of his blatant sin, and even though he confessed and the Lord "put away" his sin (v.13), he still had to face sin's consequences and learn his lesson. Romans 6.23 comes to mind – "For the wages of sin is death" – and that central divine principle still stands; but then, praise God – "but the gift of God [is] eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord". There is the Gospel of grace in one verse – and the reason for it.

A third source of trials can be the Lord Himself! As a Father with His children, He does chasten, test, purge, and if it comes to it, judge., He behaves like this, not by whim or malice, but by His love for us – His guiding, warning, correcting and instructing, though probably uncomfortable for us at the time, being part of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying ministry. We can think of the Lord allowing Satan to attack poor Job (Job 1.6-12, 20-22); and of Jesus' words, "Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it"; and in Hebrews, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" / "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons ... No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (John 15.2 / Hebrews 5.8; 12.7a,11 / ...).

When life is not the way we would wish it to be, we go to the Lord in His Word and in our prayers. We tell Him how things are; we confess and seek His forgiveness where necessary; we wait on Him and listen to Him for His guidance; and we rehearse His abundant Christ-promises, claiming them, resting in them, and living by them.

Yes, as Jesus our Saviour has told us, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" – whatever may be its cause: "but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16.33b). We go on in good heart, with the Lord, and with our fellow pilgrims.

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