

The Puzzles of Job

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Chapter Seven

WHY DO THE WICKED PROSPER?

Job was a master at striking at the root of things. He could look at a problem and in very few words frame a question that went right to the heart of it. We face these same puzzles today, but sometimes we lack the ability to analyze the problems or we are reluctant to put our thoughts into words for fear we might be thought stupid.

Job's fifth question is one that every observing person has asked at one time or another. Philosophers, moralists and just plain everyday people have asked this question. Perhaps there have been times when we have shaken our heads in confusion and anger, and this query has boiled out of us in an angry outburst. Job put it in these words, "**Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?**" (Job 21:7). This is not an easy question to answer. It is too serious to be made light of. It cannot be passed off by a shrug of the shoulders. How many persons have remarked after observing the flourishing of the wicked: "It does not pay to be good. Others who have not tried half as hard as I have to do what is right are better off than I am."

Others have asked this same question down through the years. A great poet of another day wrote:

"Blessed, almighty Jove!
With deep amazement I view the world, and marvel at your ways,
How can you reconcile it to your sense of right and wrong,
Thus loosely to dispense your bounties on the wicked and the good?
How can your laws be known or understood?"

This man thought GOD was too loose with His blessings. It seemed that those who were wrong were blessed and those who were right suffered. This was very much Job's problem when he asked: "**Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?**" (Job 21:7).

Some 450 B.C. a great thinker by the name of Euripides wrote: "Does someone say that there be gods above? There are not, no, there are not, let no fool led by old false fables, thus deceive you. Look at the facts themselves, yielding my words no undue credence; for I say that kings kill, rob,

break oaths, lay cities waste by fraud, and doing thus are happier than those who live calm, pious lives day after day." To this man the prosperity of the wicked was an argument for atheism. There just could not be a God or gods in Heaven and this condition exist on earth.

Though Eurpides could not reconcile the prosperity of the wicked with the existence of a just God, he could not find it in his heart to deny altogether that God existed. He prayed, "O Zeus, if there be a Zeus, for I know him only by report." It is obvious from this that the prosperity of the wicked is a knotty problem to any thinking person.

So far we have only seen one side of this puzzle, the side that deals with the seeming good treatment that evil men receive in this world. The other half of the problem is just as difficult to understand; Why does so much trouble and suffering fall upon the good? In his own mind Job was contrasting his own state of loss and suffering with that of wicked men whom he observed around him prosperous and in good health.

Not only did Job ask, "**Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?**" but he continued, "**Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them**" (Job 21:8, 9). Remember that part of Job's loss was the loss of his children. A great wind had destroyed the house in which his sons and daughters were eating. Job's family was wiped out in that one terrible storm.

Whereas Job had lost his flocks and herds the wicked were prospering. "**Their bull gendereth,**" Job said, "**and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf**" (Job 21:10). Cattle then as now provided much of the living for people. There was milk for food, power for plowing and meat for the table.

Job was not the only one who saw this seeming disparity. The wicked themselves saw it and reacted in according with their evil hearts. Job said of it, "**They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?**" (Job 21:11-15). The wicked also saw that the righteous often suffer while those living in evil go free. They concluded that that they did not need to pray nor seek GOD, nor walk in His ways, nor serve Him. They just wanted Him to leave them alone. They believed that they were far better off than those who tried to observe these matters.

Job was a good example of the righteous suffering adversities. He was trying his best to be good and obedient before GOD. He was trying to walk in his ways and to serve Him acceptably. He was one who "**rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of (his children).**"

When speaking to the Devil concerning Job, the LORD said, "**Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?**" Yet calamity fell upon Job and he could not escape it. Job's problem had to do with the fact that he was a man seeking to walk in the will of GOD but was

stripped of all means of making a living and of his family and of his health. The problem is still with us!

John Bunyan in his famous Christian allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*, sought to answer this same puzzle. "Christian," the main character, had one struggle after another as he walked the right road, while those who abandoned themselves to folly and pleasure enjoyed unbroken ease!

What we think we see as we observe these things is that we are creatures or victims of the unaccountable wheel of fortune or chance. There seems to be no rhyme nor reason for the things that happen to us. Our conflict of mind and heart comes when we attempt to reconcile the misfortunes of good men and seemingly good fortunes of bad men with the justice and wisdom of GOD.

Bible Writers Comment on This Puzzle

Solomon, famed for his wisdom and noted for his keen observations saw this very thing and said, **"There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity. Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun"** (Ecclesiastes 8:14, 15).

Another of the writers of Scripture who commented on this was Asaph, author of a number of the Psalms. One of them, Psalm 73, takes up this very subject. Asaph sang, **"Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart."** He knew this to be true, but it was not what he had observed with his eyes, for he went on to say, **"but as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped."** Here is the reason: **"For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."** Asaph could not make the puzzle go together. How was it that the wicked would prosper and the good not?

He continued with his observation: **"For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm"** (speaking of the wicked). This is a cause for real wonder, for surely if there is a real difference between the righteous and the wicked, it will show up at the time of their death. The notion that is common among us and one hard to get rid of is that a quiet death means a happy hereafter. But a quiet death may simply be the result of a hard heart. Some men are so foolish as to play games with their hearts until they are so hard that when death comes, they continue to ignore GOD even at that critical time.

Asaph continued his song concerning the wicked: **"They are not in trouble as other men . . . Therefore pride compasseth them as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the Heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them."** What Asaph is saying here is that these wicked persons offer a full cup to any who will join with them in their evil ways, those who will have a good time and not be party spoilers.

"How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak this; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me." This was too much for Asaph to reason out without the help of GOD.

Jeremiah was also plagued by this same puzzle for he wrote: **"Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins. But thou, O LORD, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter"** (Jeremiah 12:1-3).

Habakkuk was another prophet of GOD who was plagued by this question. He saw the sins of his people and was perplexed by GOD's seeming silence. Here is what he wrote about the matter: **"Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?"** (Habakkuk 1:12-17).

It is the nature of human beings to ask questions, yet I think ours is a generation that is asking more questions than any other. We want to know the why of just about everything. We start life like a lookout on a boat that is lost. We never know what is ahead. We have to ask questions in the hope that we will learn what is coming.

Some questions are childish and others are very simple to answer. Children want to know where the light goes when the lamp is turned off. They want to know where the sun disappears to and why it does not burn up. But as we grow older, we want the answers to some of the more complicated and serious things of life. And there comes a day, when, like Job, we face the question of why it is that the innocent often suffer and the wicked often seem to be blessed. Some of life's questions appear to be unanswerable. They are problems that seemingly cannot be solved. We are puzzled by what happens to us and what happens to those about us.

"Why did this happen to me?" is one of the most common questions any of us ask. "Why am I sick?" "Why am I poor?" "Why are some rich who make no attempt to do the right things?" "Why was our child taken when he was such a good child?" What pastor has not faced this question uttered by broken-hearted parents?

Some people try very hard to be what they should be. The father leads his family in devotions to GOD. He sees that they have every advantage possible to grow spiritually and to live morally right in this world. Yet, trouble seems to hound them as a bloodhound follows the course of an escaped convict. The wife and mother may become ill, and the children get into one trouble after another. Work may fail, and finally the man himself may die in agony from some dread disease.

In contrast there are those of whom we could correctly say, "**God is not in all their thoughts.**" They live entirely for themselves. They take every selfish advantage to gain their ends and do not care at whose expense they gain their goals. They eat their food and never once thank GOD for it nor for the ability to taste and enjoy it. They heedlessly use GOD's name in vain. They are smug and shameless, yet they are successful in business. Troubles that plague the ordinary person never seem to come near them. As Job said, "**their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them . . . They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and the harp and rejoice at the sound of the organ**" (Job 21:9-12).

This puzzle reaches its climax in the person and life of JESUS CHRIST Himself. His was the mind that planned the world: "**All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made.**" It was His purpose that this world should be a good world (Genesis 1:31). His thoughts as He walked among men were pure and undefiled. He spoke words that blessed the people of His day and all the ages since. But wicked men crowned His head with thorns and lived to boast about it. His were the hands which held the thunderbolts of Heaven. yet rested in blessing upon children on city streets. Cruel men took His hands and spiked them to a tree and lived to laugh at Him.

JESUS CHRIST had walked the eternal pathways. While on earth His feet took Him only on missions of mercy. Yet cruel men made His feet fast with nails driven in by a Roman mall and lived to mock Him. How could this be? Why did GOD stand by and let this take place? Why did He not burn the world to a crisp from the heat of the sun? Why did He not turn the winds loose and blow these wicked men off into space leaving them to fall forever? It seemed that for a season the wicked triumphed, accomplished their diabolical purposes, laughed and went their way!

We must face this problem and seek an answer. We make no claim to have all the answers for every situation. It has often been my lot to sit beside the bed of the dying and say, "I don't know why this must be." This has taught me not to try to explain every event in life.

Some Answers to the Puzzle

Let us look again at our puzzle. What is it we are seeking an answer for? It is this: Why does GOD allow the wicked to live on in their wickedness? Why is it so many persons are getting by with so much evil?

The first answer I would suggest is the Scriptures teach us that GOD allows the wicked to live in order that they might turn to Him. GOD wants to make miracles of mercy of them, to give them life so that they might be transformed by His grace into the sons of GOD. We so easily forget

that each one of us who is saved was saved by grace alone and not because we were so good that the LORD was forced to take us in. JESUS said, "**I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance**" (Matthew 9:13).

We sometimes think that we are better than others. We forget that were it not for the grace of GOD we would all perish (Luke 13:3). GOD does not force salvation upon us, but waits for us to repent, to admit that we are sinners in need. It is then that He can take the greatest of sinners and make them His children through faith in CHRIST JESUS.

We read in the Word of GOD that He would "**have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth**" (I Timothy 2:4). It would be hard for some people to believe the kind of lives some of GOD's servants led before they were converted to JESUS CHRIST. They did not become ministers of the Gospel because they were saintly. They were sinners by nature and by grace were saved. Then GOD laid upon them the burden of telling this wonderful grace to others. We do not say this to magnify anyone's former sinful life, but to magnify the grace of our GOD.

It was the lost sinner that JESUS came to seek and save. Peter, a cursing fisherman, became the mighty preacher at Pentecost. Saul, the persecutor of the Christians, became the great Apostle of CHRIST to the Gentiles. Through his life and through the inspired epistles he wrote, he was instrumental in changing more lives than perhaps any other servant of CHRIST who has ever lived.

These are but a sample of the great host who have become members of GOD's family through faith in CHRIST JESUS. These feel kin to Paul when he said that he was the chiefest of sinners. With one voice we thank GOD for letting us live to come to know what it means to be saved from our sins through the redemption in CHRIST.

To you who read this and who are not trusting in CHRIST, there is hope for you while there is life. Why not heed the call of CHRIST. Come as you are and receive Him by faith as your SAVIOUR. You, too, will know the joy of sins forgiven.

"The mercy of GOD is an ocean divine,
A boundless, fathomless flood.
Launch out into the deep, cut away the shore line
And be lost in the fullness of GOD."

So then, GOD allows the wicked to live in order that they might repent and be saved from their sin. It is always good for us to remember that "**God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us**" (Romans 5:8).

GOD does not allow the wicked to live so that they may go on in their wickedness and sneer at GOD's people. The unsaved should not use the time to boast of their strength and their own plans and ignore the things of the LORD. They are allowed to live only that they might make good use of that time to come to CHRIST. Never is life and time granted in order that any of us might go through life with utter disregard for righteousness. The appeal in the Word is for us to "come." Now is the day of salvation. Our strength, our opportunities, our ability to think - all of these

things will go some day, so let us use them to make the right decision now.

Job not only wondered why the wicked were allowed to continue on in their wickedness, but he was puzzled by the fact that they were often blest abundantly in material ways. Why should this be? GOD answers that for us when He says in Romans 2:4: "**Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.**"

GOD sometimes takes the sinner and treats him as a father might treat a wayward son, giving him more attention than He would other children simply in order to break the son's heart by the father's goodness. So it is that GOD pours out His loving-kindness to sinners. He seeks to humble their hearts in order that they will turn to Him in complete trust.

We sometimes think that GOD is slow in keeping His promise of final retribution and wrath upon the wicked. Peter disclosed the real purpose of GOD in withholding judgment. He wrote, "**The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance**" (II Peter 3:9). Time is given us to use for eternity. GOD's blessings are poured upon us in order to bring us to repentance.

There are always two sides, however, to every coin. We are inclined to forget that the Scriptures tell us that the way of the wicked is hard. Somewhere, sometime, things must and will be made right. GOD allows the prosperity of the wicked in order to show that there must be a judgment to come. The injustices of the world are not always made right in this life. It is not all of life to live, nor all of death to die.

We recall with horror some of the crimes that took place in the last World War. It is true that some of the criminals were apprehended, but not all. And who can say that the judgment man meted out was sufficient for the horrible crimes committed?

We cannot always evaluate motive any more than we can ever evaluate the far-reaching effects of a crime. A man may in a sudden rage kill another who is the head of a family. Society punishes the killer for the crime of murder, but who can measure the grief of the widow, or who can weigh the anguish in the hearts of the children because they are fatherless? Or who can spell out the bitterness such loss may cause these children as they grow up. Somewhere justice must be measured out to suit the crime in an exact way.

What about little children who suffer, weep, starve and die because men like mad monsters fight and destroy? Someone has been quoted as saying that such and such a crime took place on last Tuesday and GOD did not even notice. But someone has answered saying, "Yes, but do not forget that GOD does not pay all of His bills on Tuesday!" Somewhere, sometime, GOD will make all things right. We forget so easily that all must appear before GOD, there to receive just dues for the things done in the body.

We may often exclaim: "Look what he is getting by with!" Remember, whatever "he" is getting by with, is only for a time. We read in Acts 17:31, GOD "**hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he**

hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

In Proverbs 11 we read: "**Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.**"
The wicked may live and prosper, but the end is not yet, for judgment will come.

Do not overlook the fact that Job, Solomon, Asaph and Jeremiah had an answer to this question of why the wicked are allowed to live and prosper. While none of these men could understand all the ways of the LORD, they trusted Him for what they could not understand. This is the kind of trust that all the children of GOD may have.

"I cannot understand
The why and wherefore of a thousand things:
The drosses, the annoyances, the daily stings,
I cannot understand,
But I can trust
For better trusting perfect comfort brings.

"I cannot see the end,
The hidden meaning of each trial sent,
The pattern into which each tangled thread is lent,
I cannot see the end,
But I can trust,
And in GOD's changeless love I am content."

A Time of Reckoning

Job remembered that "**the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath**" (Job 21:30). Solomon had much to say about this same subject. In the instructions to his son he said, "**The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just. Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly. The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools**" (Proverbs 3:33-35). "**The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot**" (Proverbs 10:7).

We have seen how Asaph in Psalm 73 was puzzled over the prosperity of the wicked. He could not find an answer to his problem until, he said "**I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.**" He got his thoughts straight when he began to think as GOD thinks. He had to see things from the sanctuary, that is, from the viewpoint of GOD. Such a perspective is what we need. We are shortsighted; we are impatient; we see through a darkened glass.

After seeing things from GOD's viewpoint Asaph's song changes: "**Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors . . . Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory!"**

Think with Jeremiah when he turned to those who prospered in wickedness and were happy only when they dealt in treachery. He asked the question that all such might well ponder: "**How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?**" (Jeremiah 12:5). Indeed, where will the wicked flee when the deep waters roll? There will come a time when the grace of GOD will no longer be available. There will be none to turn to when death overtakes us, and we are still rejecting GOD's offer.

We are all here for a brief season. Now is the time to come to the SAVIOUR. This is the accepted time. It is today that the invitation goes out, "**Come unto me,**" our SAVIOUR said, "**all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls**" (Matthew 11:28, 29).

"O turn ye, O turn ye, for why will ye die,
When GOD in great mercy is coming so nigh?
Now JESUS invites you, the SPIRIT says, 'Come,'
And angels are waiting to welcome you home.

"And now CHRIST is ready your souls to receive,
O how can you question, if you will believe?
If sin is your burden, why will you not come?
'Tis you He bids welcome; He bids you come home.

"In riches, in pleasures, what can you obtain
To sooth your affliction, or banish your pain?
To bear up your spirit when summoned to die,
Or waft you to mansions of glory on high?

"Why will you be starving, and feeding on air?
There's mercy in JESUS, enough and to spare;
If still you are doubting, make trial and see
And prove that His mercy is boundless and free."

Let no one deceive you concerning the fact that JESUS CHRIST is able to save you now. He died for the ungodly. Put your trust in Him and rest in His finished work for you.

Neither be deceived into thinking that there is escape from sin and its consequence outside of CHRIST. The warning of Scripture is, "**How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation . . .**" (Hebrews 2:3). GOD will judge sin at one of two places: either at Calvary where JESUS paid the penalty, or at the Great White Throne Judgment where the sinner pays the penalty. GOD's invitation is still open, however: "**Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me**" (Revelation 3:20).

Another answer to our questions as to why the wicked live and become old and are mighty in power is that trust does not need the answers to all questions that come along. Neither does love need to answer all such questions. There are many things that a child cannot understand about the things his father does, but because he loves and trusts his father, he does what he is told. So it

is with us and our Heavenly FATHER.

We cannot understand for the present, at least, all the things He does. But we know that He knows what He is doing, and because we love and trust Him we let the matter rest there. Quite often we do not understand why things should be as they are, but we know His way is best and wait until He sees fit to shed more light on the things that perplex us. Neither should we try to find an answer to those who may ask us, "Why did GOD let this happen to me?" We know GOD has the answer, and that is sufficient for us.

We often grow impatient and demand that circumstances should be worked out according to our plans and that right now. In this we overlook the fact that we are not the only persons in the world who are suffering. Perhaps we recall reading of the man who said, "I was miserable because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet!" It is easy to so concentrate on our own sorrows that we cannot see the sorrows of others. We tend to forget that if we know nothing of trials ourselves, we will not be able to help others in similar circumstances. To whom does a mother who has just lost her child go for comfort? To another mother who has had a similar sorrow, for with her there will not only be sympathy, but understanding also.

Toward the end of the Book of Job we find that the patriarch prayed for his friends. Could he have prayed with deep compassion if he himself had not suffered greatly? Often our trials and sorrows are blessings in disguise. GOD allows them to come to us so that we may be of service to others who experience similar difficulties. When in need of comfort, all of us find that there is no one who can help us like the person who can honestly say, "I know how you feel, for I went through that same thing myself!"

If we are willing to look away unto JESUS and, therefore, away from ourselves, we will become a greater blessing than we ever dreamed was possible. The purpose of our sufferings may be so that we can minister to others. Deep calls unto deep. The heart that is broken knows the heart that is breaking. It was for this reason that our SAVIOUR warned His disciples against seeking authority or a high place in life, but suggested instead, "**Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many**" (Matthew 20:26-28). As He pointed out in another place, the way to save our life is to lose it. Even though from the human standpoint we might think we have reason to complain or be despondent or bitter, and even rebellious, the truth is that there is no justification for any of these. If we lose our life in service for JESUS' sake, we will save it as He said (Matthew 16:25).

Some Benefits to the Sufferer

It has been well said that all sunshine and nothing else make a desert. This is true on the earth and it is also true in the heart. No field produces like the field that has been plowed up. No one can really sing the songs of a broken heart unless he has had a broken heart. None can weep with those who weep unless they too have known the taste of tears. The sweetest perfume comes from the flower that has been crushed. Sorrow, broken hearts, tired lives, disappointed hopes - these are topics of all time, but they are understood only by those who have experienced them.

"I walked a mile with pleasure,
She chattered all the way,
but not a thing she taught me,
With all she had to say.

"I walked a mile with sorrow,
And not a word said she,
But O, the things she taught me,
When sorrow walked with me."

A man of GOD once said to me, "If I must choose between being healthy and being holy, I choose to be holy." Someone in deep trouble wrote: "Amid my list of blessings infinite, stands this the foremost, that my heart has bled."

"If, as I live, I could become
Immune to beauty's call
And never be affected
By a lovely rose at all;
If I could watch a sunset
And not become inspired
Nor by a burning bush
That autumn flame has fired;
Or have a friend to play me false
And never shed a tear,
And to another friend in pain
I'd turn a defeated ear
I'm sure, then, I'd suffer less
If all of this were so;
But, if it were, I'd just as well
Have died long years ago."

This was the very character of our LORD's life among us. **"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted"** (Hebrews 2:14-18).

This was the truth Paul gave to the believers in Corinth: **"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God"** (II Corinthians 1:3, 4).

Later on in the same book where Paul refers to a disciplinary action he had the church in Corinth take in regard to one of its members, he wrote: **"Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus . . . Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you. Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all"** (II Corinthians 7:6, 12, 13).

"If none were sick and none were sad,
What service could we render?
I think if we were always glad,
We scarcely could be tender.

"Did our beloved never need
Our patient ministration,
Earth would grow cold, and miss, indeed,
Its sweetest consolation.

"If sorrow never claimed our heart,
And every wish were granted,
Patience would die, and
Life would be disenchanted."

While we may not understand why it is we suffer at the very time we are trying to do our best, and at a time when evildoers are getting by with so much, let us remember this: The world is filled with troubled hearts who need a word of comfort. They may be waiting for that word that we alone can give.

"So the heart from the hardest trial
Gains the purest joy of all,
And from lips that have tasted sadness,
The sweetest songs will fall.
For as peace comes after suffering,
And love is reward of pain,
So after earth comes Heaven,
And out of our losses the gain!"

Let us not fail to point the sorrowing to the Man of Sorrows; or the disappointed to Him who never disappoints; or the bruised to Him who was bruised for our iniquities; or the comfortless to Him who knows the longing of every heart.

Another thing to consider when we think of the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the good is that we readily see the things that we want to see. Remember, Job did not say that all the righteous suffer and that all the wicked are prosperous; but when we are suffering, we tend to look at life in that way. The fact is that many who are righteous are prosperous, and many who are wicked suffer terribly. The person who looks at a few isolated cases only and then complains

that it does not pay to be good is not being wise. He is acting like the Psalmist who said at one time in his haste: "**All men are liars**" (Psalms 116:11).

Advantages of Good Homes

All the good things in life cannot be measured by money. It may yet be true that the best things in life are free. There is a great advantage from being born into a righteous home. What a rich heritage those have whose parents sing the hymns and songs that mold the child into a right relationship with GOD. Think of the love, the devotion, the spiritual influence that such children receive right from the moment of birth. It has often been said that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. What a privilege to have that hand belong to a mother who walks with GOD. Oh, mother, what a responsibility is yours when you cradle that little life in your arm, and hug it to your bosom with unspeakable joy!

There are advantages received by being trained in the home of righteous parents.

Think of the training that comes from a righteous father who say, "**My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil**" (Proverbs 4:20-27).

Think of what it means to be taught to watch with care our speech and our actions, to ponder the direction our life is taking and to learn to walk righteously.

Think of the advantage of being trained to hate what GOD hates. We need a revival of the teaching of the things GOD says He hates such as pride, lying, injustice, wicked plots, hurting others, telling lies about others and making trouble among brethren (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Do we as fathers and mothers care about these matters? Do we take time to talk to our children concerning them, can we take them aside and talk to them calmly and naturally about such subjects as GOD, sin, salvation and righteous living?

Think of the distinct advantage of being trained to know wisdom, justice and judgment. What a blessing to have a foundation laid for the love of sobriety and for the hating of foolishness, to love the counsel of the LORD, to forsake not mercy and truth, and to honor the LORD with our substance. How good it is to understand early in life the chastening of the LORD and not to be weary of His correction: "**For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.**"

For us to learn to turn to GOD when we are corrected and not against Him is an invaluable lesson to us. For us to have our own way generally leads to despair and darkness. But in following the LORD's way we find that wisdom is of more value than silver or gold or precious stones. True wisdom is true riches and honor.

Think also of the advantage of being taught to honor father and mother as the LORD has commanded. Some children have lost some of the best things in life because they were not taught by word of lip and deed of life to honor their parents. "**A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother**" (Proverbs 10:1). Sorry indeed is the lot of the son who thinks of his mother as the one who nags and his father as "the old man" because they seek to have him walk in the ways of the LORD.

A great influence for good is brought to bear upon us if we are raised in an environment of righteousness. Do not shout too quickly that it does not pay to be righteous. The kind of language we hear about us every day influences us in a very marked manner. If what we hear is swearing, vulgar speech and suggestive talk, it will take a miracle of GOD's grace to undo the effect of it in our hearts.

Think of the influence of kindness expressed by each member of the home, honesty in dealing, gentleness in disposition, a home where the effort is made to live as Christians should. But if in the home we cheat or are sour in disposition or cruel with our tongues and unkind to one another, we will reap what we sow.

Think also of the peace of heart that is the reward of living righteously. "**The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace**" (Psalm 29:11). Contrast this with Isaiah 57:20, 21: "**But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.**" The knowledge of peace alone is worth all the effort that we may expend in living for GOD.

Consider some of the Scripture passages with regard to peace.

"**For he is our peace**" (Ephesians 2:14).

"**Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**" (Romans 5:1).

"**To be spiritually minded is life and peace**" (Romans 8:6).

"**For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost**" (Romans 14:17).

"**But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace**" (Psalm 37:11).

"**Great peace have they which love thy law; and nothing shall offend them**" (Psalm 119:165).

"**The fruit of the Spirit is . . . peace**" (Galatians 5:22).

"**Be careful (anxious) for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally,**

brethren, whatsoever things are true, ...honest, ...just, ...pure, ...of good report . . . think on these things . . . and the God of peace shall be with you" (Philippians 4:6-9).

The person was correct who wrote:

"It pays to serve Jesus, it pays every day,
It pays every step of the way!"

It is not enough, however, to merely consider the value of a righteous life over the brief span we live of some sixty or seventy years. Of course, if we are but creatures of clay, chance comes to this world, muddling around for a time and then turning back to the clods, then we may live like clods and forget this whole business of righteous living. But that is not all there is to life. Man was made a living soul, and he will exist forever and ever - somewhere. So it is well not only to consider that it pays to serve GOD and walk with Him, but it makes a difference in the way we die if we walk righteously. Paul has written, "**For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us**" (Romans 8:18).

With regard to the wicked, the Scriptures state: "**Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling**" (Psalm 49:14). There is a marked contrast in the death of the righteous: "**Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints**" (Psalm 116:15). "**Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace**" (Psalm 37:37). "**The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death**" (Proverbs 14:32). The Prophet Balaam, when he beheld Israel, said, "**Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!**" (Numbers 23:10). But to die the death of the righteous one must first live the life of the righteous.

But the end is not yet! Death leads to judgment, for "**it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment**" (Hebrews 9:27). When we stand before GOD do you think that it would be a matter of sorrow to us that we have lived righteously for our SAVIOUR? Indeed not!

James wrote: "**Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door**" (James 5:9). Remember this and walk in righteousness! And with that recall the advice of Solomon to young men: "**Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of the thine eyes: but know this, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh; for childhood and youth are vanity**" (Ecclesiastes 11:9, 10).

The end of all things is at hand; therefore, we must be sober and watch unto prayer.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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