

A QUEST FOR SOULS

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PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

The word spoken a moment ago by the honored pastor touching the wisdom and necessity that we Christians, one by one, shall to-day give ourselves to thought and to effort and to prayer, to help others about us, who are in wrong relations religiously, is a word that ought to sink deeply into our very heart. How great a thing it is to help people in this highest and best way, even in the upward way! GOD takes our efforts, frail as they are, and infirm, and if we give them earnestly to Him and for Him, His blessing upon them is sure. "**He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.**"

THE MINISTRY OF SUFFERING

Text: "**Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant. that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.**" - Isaiah 50:10.

The Bible has a message for every life, no matter what its duty or test or need. The vitality of the Bible is indestructible. No condition nor exigency of human life comes, but that the Bible has a word to meet it exactly. In every congregation such as this there come always to such services some who have been called to walk the vale of suffering and sorrow and tears. Numbers and numbers have paused at the dose of these mid-day services, to tell me of certain deep burdens they were bearing, or certain sore griefs that they were suffering, of certain deep perplexities that confronted them. I am to bring you a promise this morning - one of the most comforting and precious in the Bible. It is in the fiftieth chapter of Isaiah, the tenth verse, and you will keep it, because you will need this promise: "**Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.**"

May I tell you how I came to find that promise? We are all along coming upon promises that we did not know were in the Bible. What a living book it is! And how increasingly wonderful it becomes, the more we read it and study it!

I was in one of the Texas cities some years ago, preaching in some daily meetings, and my attention was called to the devotion to CHRIST of a noble mother in that congregation. I had rarely seen anything to rank with her devotion, and in many ways my attention was called to it. Some months went by, and there came from that city to my city, another mother from that church, and presently I asked her about the first mother.

She said: "I came especially to see you about the first mother. Her case is unspeakably pitiful. It is this: She has come to the place, because of trouble, sorrow and suffering, where her spirit seems all beaten into the dust, and she is without light. If you ask her the question if she trusts CHRIST, she will answer without hesitation, in the words of Job: '**Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.**' But," said the second mother, "this first mother is in deep darkness, and is without light. I have come to you to ask if there is some suggestion you can give her out of GOD's Word."

That is how I came to find this text. Now you are ready to hear it quoted again. Mark it, for you will need it: "**Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.**" "**Who is among you that feareth the Lord,**" - the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom - "**that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?**" That was her case, exactly. What is to be done? The rest of the verse tells us: "**Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.**"

You will be glad to know, to trace the story just a moment further, that this promise was the message GOD used to recover this bedarkened, sorrowing mother, and to thrill her heart again with glorious peace.

Let us look at that promise a little while this morning, because sooner or later all our feet must go down that vale of sorrow and suffering and darkness and tears, and this text describes a condition that will sometime come to us all. What is the condition? Here is one that fears the Lord, and obeys the voice of His servant, and yet walketh in darkness, and hath no light. That is the condition that sometimes comes to us in our earthly experience, and that condition is sometimes the severest test that ever comes to us.

Darkness is always trying - to us. Darkness is trying to us physically, especially when we are ill, and agitated, and disturbed. Oh, how sick people dread the night and long for the morning! Surely, they will be better when the light comes! And when we come into the realm of darkness religious, how terrible such darkness becomes, and how glorious is light when it streams down on our darkness!

It raises an old question, as old as Job, and it may be older: Why do tears and sufferings and darkness come to those who are the friends of GOD? We can understand why trouble would come to the man who is not GOD's friend and refuses to be, for as a man sows, so shall he reap. If he sows to unbelief, the reaping must be of a character with the sowing. We can understand

why the godless man, the man who will not be GOD's friend at all, would come to the harvest of distress. We can understand that. But that is not the difficult question. The question is: Why do sufferings, and darkness, and tears come to those who are the friends of GOD?

Now, sometimes there is an off-hand, superficial answer given at that point. Sometimes when a Christian is seen to be in darkness and trouble and tears, the superficial critic pounces upon him and says: "This trouble comes as the result of some sin."

The Word of GOD is not that cruel. The Word of GOD does not teach that doctrine. That doctrine is as false as it is cruel, and as cruel as it is false. When you turn to the Word of GOD, it is perfectly clear. Listen:

"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. . . If ye be without chastisement, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had Fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shalt we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" And then the beautiful words of JESUS are in point just here, where He says: "**As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.**" So you see, a part of the program and plan and experience of human life is chastisement, is trial. "**In the world,**" said JESUS, "**ye shall have tribulation.**" It is one of the most expressive words in the Bible. But He goes on to say: "**But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.**"

But now we are raising the question: Why do the friends of GOD pass down the vale of suffering and darkness and tears? There are some partial answers, to which our attention may be called briefly this morning. I say partial answers. They must be partial. The full-orbed and complete answer we must wait for until we shall read it yonder in the golden glow of the land and life above. But there are partial answers, why trouble and trials and tears and darkness and suffering come again and again to the friends of GOD here in this world. Let us glance at some of these partial answers.

For one thing, trouble. If rightly used, enables us to honor GOD. Trouble, then, is a trust, and we are so to receive it. We understand about other things being trusts.

- There is the man of education; he must answer for those superior attainments.
- There is the one who can sing so that hearts are enchanted by the music; that singer must answer for that gift.
- There is the man of money, and the man of money must answer for it. The men who make money must answer for that capacity.

Whatever our gifts or capacities, all of them are to be received as trusts from GOD, to be used in His name, to help humanity. Now, along with other trusts comes trouble. Trouble is to be received, however it comes, as a trust, and we are to bear it, we are to meet it, we are to go through it, we are to face it like we ought, as a trust from GOD, to be used for the glory of His great name.

You recall Job's manifold and fiery trials, that patriarch in the land of Uz, that conquering business man, and that faithful friend of GOD - Job, the man whom GOD so approved and applauded.

One day Satan impiously said to GOD: "If you will give me a chance at your man Job, I will shake his religion out of him, and I will make him deny you." Said Satan impiously to GOD: "Your man Job is serving you because of sheer selfishness. He knows, in the crude saying of the world, 'which side of his bread is buttered,' and therefore is he proposing to serve you. Give me a chance," said Satan, "and I will make him deny you."

And GOD said to Satan: "I will give you carte blanche at Job. You may do anything you please to him except to kill him."

And then the awful testing began.

There was Job, all unacquainted with the colloquy between Satan and GOD, happy and prosperous in all his surroundings.

And then there came a dark-robed messenger, which took from him all his property; and I tell you, when you strike a man in his property you have dealt him a staggering blow, and some men seem never to recover from such blow. What a pity that 'tis so! Then there came another messenger, saying that this trouble had come to Job - his servants were all taken away, and then there came another messenger, telling him the awful tidings that his children, all and each, had gone down into dusty death. But stricken and beaten to the very dust though that Father was, he simply made answer through the darkness: "**the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.**

Blessed be the name of the Lord."

And then there came another black-robed messenger, and Job was stricken in his health, so that from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, his body was one festering mass of affliction and suffering. And when his erstwhile friends in the days of his prosperity came to see him, so grievous were Job's sufferings, that those men sat around him for seven days and did not deign to open their lips, so terrible was Job's plight, and when at last they did speak, they said, in effect: "Job, you are the worst man out of perdition, or this never would have come to you." Miserable comforters were they all!

Job said to them: "Gentlemen, your diagnosis is incorrect. I do not know why this awful aggregation of troubles has come down to swallow me up, but let come upon me what will, though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

And GOD brought Job out of all those troubles, and made the latter days of his life incomparably more glorious than the former, and you and I are to-day strengthened by the very recitation of how GOD sustained Job in the black Friday that long ago came to his life.

There was a time in my life, when for days and days, the only book I wanted to read was the book of Job, and I read it through and through and through, that book of Job, that tells how the human heart is swept in its deepest depths of suffering and darkness, and yet how GOD blesses it and brings it up and out and sets the soul again in the high place of safety and peace. Trouble rightly borne honors GOD. Mind. when trouble comes, how you behave. No matter what the trouble is, mind - how you behave.

Many a man has dishonored GOD when trouble came. No matter what the trouble is, no matter what brought it, no matter who brought it, no matter how it came about, GOD is dishonored if a Christian does not bear his fiery trial like he ought to bear it. You are being tested for GOD, and you will dishonor Him egregiously, or you will honor Him gloriously, according to your behavior when trouble is on. Remember that.

I am thinking now of a Christian girl who married a noisy, disputatious unbeliever. Serious matter that! Oh, when will the people as seriously view this destiny-shaping question of marriage as it ought to be viewed? When will parents be as careful in their teaching about it, and young people as careful in their decisions about it, as they ought to be?

This dear girl, a glorious Christian, was wooed and won by a handsome young fellow, but he was a scorner of the things of GOD, and she went into that atmosphere. His Father and mother and his grandparents were likewise stout unbelievers, and all of them lived in the same big home. And then there began a daily trial of that girl's faith.

The most insidious attacks were made on her faith, from this angle and that, but she held calm and steadfast and true to JESUS during all of that first year of their wedded life.

She had to make her way to the house of GOD alone, but she went, and that went on for about a year, when one day, as she moved about the duties of the kitchen, her clothing caught fire, and before they could reach her and put out the fire, she had received burns from which she died, a few hours later.

But while she lived, she was conscious to the last, and she bore her sufferings with all the glorious devotion of some mighty martyr for GOD.

Never a word of reproach or bitterness escaped her lips - never one word. She went on quoting GOD's great and precious promises to the last, and when it was evident to her that she was going, she stretched out those charred, blackened, once beautiful hands and arms, and tried to put them around her husband's neck, and said: "Poor Charlie, the thing that tries me, and the only thing, about going away, is that I have not lived long enough to teach you and your dear parents and the dear old grandparents, that JESUS is real and sure, that He is a Saviour, and that He does help us, and that He is our refuge in every time of trouble and need."

And then she went away, and the funeral was had, and the body was left to rest yonder in the cemetery.

The family returned to the home, and the day died down to nightfall, and there by the open fire sat the bereaved ones, when presently the young husband stirred and said to his Father and to his grandfather: "Mary had what the rest of us do not have, and I am going to seek her Saviour."

And the Father said: "My boy, you are right. I know it. I feel it. She has taught me that, and I will seek Him, too."

And the old grandfather stirred, and put his staff out, and came over to the son and grandson, and laid his hand on the head of each, and said: "My sons, you are right. Mary did have what the rest of us do not have, and I am going to seek her Saviour, too."

And in three days those men had found CHRIST, and numbers of their loved ones around them. A little woman, called to pass through the vale of deepest darkness and suffering, honored GOD through it all, and her testimony was irresistible. Mind how you behave when trouble is on you! If you carp, and cavil, and criticize, and murmur, and are evil in your speech, Oh, how you will dishonor GOD!

Trouble rightly borne will surely honor GOD.

Why do darkness and sufferings and tears come to GOD's people?

There is another partial answer. They furnish an occasion for GOD to bestow His grace. If I may so put it, they give GOD a platform on which to stand and work His great work.

- For example, there is a lawyer, well trained in the schools, and he has received his diploma and is ready for his noble calling. Now, if he is to evince his skill in legal learning, he must have his case.
- Yonder is a doctor who has been graduated after years of painstaking study. If that doctor is to demonstrate his skill in *materia medica*, he must have his case.
- Even so, the Lord JESUS CHRIST, if He is to show men what He can do for them, in the black Fridays, in the darkest vale, in the most dreadful hour, then the hour of trouble and darkness must come, that He may come and extricate us therefrom.

How often is that truth illustrated!

Paul had his thorn in the flesh. I do not know what it was, but it was something serious, you may be sure. He called it the messenger of Satan, sent to buffet him, and thrice Paul besought the Lord to take away that thorn in the flesh, but it was not taken away, and after that, Paul said: "I am glad I have it. I glory in it, because GOD has given me more of His grace than I ever would have had, but for the thorn, and so I will take the thorn and the added grace, and be enlarged in my knowledge and experience of GOD."

Why does trouble come to the child of GOD?

Many a time it is the strange way of preparing such friend of GOD to be a helper of others, as such person otherwise never could have been. There is no teacher like experience. I wonder if we really and deeply learn anything at all, except as we learn it in the realm of experience. And so trouble often comes and we pass through it, and we are fitted as we pass through it to be helpers as we never could have been but for such trouble. Paul discusses that particular doctrine when he says: "**God comforteth, in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.**"

I am thinking now of two young mothers. The baby of the first one died after a brief illness, maybe a day and night, and I was summoned to the funeral. She and the husband were not Christians. They were quite worldly and quite godless, so I had a difficult time, indeed, in reaching them and speaking to them. I went with them, in their brokenness and desolation, to the cemetery, and came back with them.

I said to them: "You will come to GOD's house, and you will get comfort there." And so they came, and in a few Sundays both of them came into the light and were saved, and they took their place in the church and made faithful followers of JESUS.

Months went by, and one day I was summoned to another funeral. The second little mother was called to put away her flaxen-haired little girl. She was utterly despairing and desolate in her grief. She, too, was an unbeliever. I read the sweetest Scriptures I could find to help her, but she did not seem to hear a word I said. At last, as the quartet began to sing, the first young mother I have described, came quietly from the place where she was, and took her place beside the second mother, and put her arms about her and gently said: "Oh, Jennie, dear, it is going to be all right!"

And Jennie answered back: "Why, Mary, it cannot be all right! Everything about it is bad and dark and wrong! It cannot be all right!"

"But," said the first mother, "I passed through this, and I know what you are passing through, and GOD called me, and through the darkness I came to Him, and He has comforted me, and He will comfort you, Jennie, dear. You cling to Him and He will bring you out."

And the first mother did more for the second mother than I could have done, maybe in days and months, for the first little mother had traveled that road of suffering herself. Oh, it is often that way, my friends!

The world's highest blessings often come out of its deepest sorrows and trials and tears. Heaven itself can be entered only by way of the cross. There is no way to get there except by the Cross of CHRIST.

Did you ever read J. M. Barrie's charming little book, "*Margaret Ogilvy*?" Everyone should read it. There is one chapter in it on "*How My Mother Got Her Soft Face*." The author is really talking about his own mother.

The story is that the oldest son in the family went away from home, when he reached his majority - went out to the big world to fight the battle of life for himself. Letters came and went, through the months of separation, between the son and mother, and one day a wire came to her that the son was desperately ill, and she had better come at once. She hurriedly packed her valise, and started to the railroad station, some miles away, committing the tasks of the home to the younger children, to do the best they could with them; but before she reached the station, there came a second messenger boy with the telegram, telling her that her boy was dead, and they were sending his body home on the next train.

The body came and the funeral was had, and the mother moved about the house, her face betokening a sorrow too deep for human speech. But after some weeks, they saw that her face shone with a light that was never on land or sea. Not a murmur escaped her, no bitterness, no complaints, no harsh words; hers was a patience like unto CHRIST's patience.

And when some neighboring woman lost her boy or her girl, when sorrow came to a neighboring home, Mr. Barrie said, five miles away, ten miles away, twenty miles away, forty miles away, the suffering and sorrowing one said: "Send for that woman who has the soft face. She will know

what to say to us, for she has passed down the vale of suffering herself."

Oh, my friends, suffering is often the way whereby we are fitted to help a broken, bruised, sinning, suffering world, as we never otherwise could help it!

"Why do sufferings and tears come to us"? There is another word. Many a time, it is a necessary discipline for us in the building of our own character.

Mark you, GOD's great concern is for our character - for what we are, not what we seem to be. GOD's great concern is for our inner, deeper selves. Over and again, trouble is GOD's disciplinary teacher to give us that experience that shall refine us and teach us and cleanse us and fit us, that we may be and do in GOD's sight what He would have at our hands.

The highest conception of life here is that it is a school, and you and I are the pupils at school, and GOD has many teachers, and one of His teachers that comes robed in black is suffering, is trial, is deepest, darkest testing.

David said:

"It is good for me that I have been. afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes."

Oh, we need, my fellow-men, to be disenchanted! Ease is the bane of everything that is good.

We need to be disenchanted, so that our trust shall not be in the flesh, nor in the world, but stayed on the living GOD.

I am thinking now of a little woman who was happily married, and two children were given her, and she lost both of those children, and they were buried in the same grave, and then she went down with complete nervous collapse, and for long months, even for some years, she was helpless as a little child, and had to be fed by loved ones, who ministered to her.

One day, as her little auntie, who was a joyful Christian, was feeding this little helpless woman, who was unusually despondent on that particular morning, the little woman said: "Oh, auntie, you say that GOD loves us. You say it, and you keep saying it. Oh, auntie, I used to think He did, but, auntie, if He loves us, why, why did He make me as I am?"

And the little auntie, after kissing her gently, waited a moment and said: "He has not made you yet, my child. He is making you now!"

When through the deep waters I call Thee to go.
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow,
For I will be with Thee, Thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to Thee Thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply,
The flame shall not hurt Thee - I only design,

Thy dross to consume; and thy gold to refine.

There is one word more. What are we to do when the trouble is on? The next tells us. "**Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?**" What is that one to do?

Here it is: "**Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.**"

There is your anchorage. It is not anywhere else.

You will grope and flounder and be in the ditch anywhere else, my friends.

Some of you have been called to pass through deep troubles - fiery troubles. You will fatally err if you go anywhere else but to GOD. There is the anchorage. If you have an anchor for a ship, you do not keep the anchor in the ship, when you need to anchor the ship. You take the anchor and put it down out yonder. So our anchor is not within us at all. We are anchored to CHRIST.

Listen to His promises: "**Because I live, ye shall live also.**" And again: "**I will never leave Thee, nor forsake Thee.**" And again: "**And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.**"

That anchor will hold.

And if you do not stay upon GOD in the dark and trying day, you have serious cause to suspect whether you have ever really trusted Him at all. Trust Him in the dark day, because GOD's grace and promises are designed for dark days, just as those great ships are built yonder to withstand the stoutest storm that ever drives the seas.

Why should you trust GOD on the dark and cloudy day? Because such a faith will glorify GOD. With your submission to GOD's will, patient, meek and uncomplaining, with your clinging trust, like Job, saying, "**I will trust Him, though He slay me;**" saying, "Whatever comes, I will follow Him the best I can, whatever the vale through which I walk" - if you will trust Him like that, you shall be a blessed witness for GOD.

Why are you to trust Him on the dark and cloudy day?

Because it won't always stay dark and cloudy, thank GOD!

Sure are His promises that "**the day will break and the shadows flee away.**" "**Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.**" "**For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.**"

It won't stay dark.

There comes a sweet, fair morning, tinted and glinted with all the favor of GOD, and you are to look forward to that morning, and cling to Him, and go your way, knowing that all shall be well.

The hour passes in two minutes more. Tell me, was this message for somebody here to-day? Oh, receive it and follow it! Is some heart here to-day perplexed and bedarkened? Take the text, I pray you, and go with it, making it your own. Take one step at a time, and then take another step, and then take another step, and He will bring you into the fair day, and you will sing with the poet:

So I go on, not knowing:
I would not know if I might.
I would rather walk with CHRIST in the dark
Than to walk alone in the light.
I would rather walk with Him by faith
Than to walk by myself with sight.

Stay yourself upon Him to-day, and from this day forward cleave ever to Him with unhesitating trust, and then may you sing with the psalmist that the Lord will perfect that which concerneth us, because His mercy endureth for ever.

THE CLOSING PRAYER

Our blessed Heavenly Father, bind the word that each of us needs to hear and heed upon our deepest heart. May we walk like we ought, in our day and generation, for the glory of GOD. May our tempers and deeds be always such as shall cause the people to take knowledge of us that we are CHRIST's and that we delight above all else to do His holy will. May we always have that mind which was in CHRIST. And, O, by example as well as by word, let us glorify CHRIST continually, each of us, till life's day is done. Bring the one that is in the darkness here to-day just to stay all on GOD, and everything shall be well. Teach us that no matter what the darkness that may come - the trial, the tears, the disappointments to beat us into the dust - no matter what the fearful surprise, the sore wrenching of the heart, the awful bitterness of spirit - no matter what - GOD's grace is and shall ever be sufficient for us. And let all these men and women say: "We will trust, though He slay us, and to-day we will cling to Him with new trust and new hope and new passion and purpose in obeying His will."

And now as you go, may His grace fill your every heart and His wisdom guide your every step, forevermore. Amen.

~ end of chapter 18 ~
