

Comfort in Our Troubles
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2 Corinthians 1:3-11
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- I. Oops. One of the things I have learned as I have walked with people through 30 years of ministry is that life can be hard.
- A. We may smile and act like everything's great on Sunday, but come Monday we may face incredible challenges, pains and struggles.
1. We may get a pink slip that says don't come back on Tuesday.
 2. The doctor may say the absolutely worst thing possible.
 3. The call may come with news of an accident or a medical emergency.
- B. I think of Terry Stucky who arrived home from work to find his wife, Anne's, car not in the garage when she was to have been home from a trip hours ago.
1. Sick with foreboding, since she hadn't called to inform him of a change in plans, he placed some calls.
 2. And he learned what he didn't want to know—that Anne's trip and life had come to a premature end on an interstate highway.
- C. Life can be hard, It can be very hard.
- II. Ugh. And it seems that it shouldn't be that way for us as the children of God.
- A. I mean if God is all powerful—which he is—and if God is all loving—which he is—shouldn't he just wipe away all troubles from us?
1. If He loves us that much and has total control and sovereignty over all things, shouldn't He protect us from accidents, injuries and stress?
 2. Shouldn't He shield us from cancer, strokes and heart disease?
- B. Now there are places in the Bible where it says that that is exactly the way it is.
1. There are passages which teach that God wonderfully protects and delivers his children from all trouble, pain and suffering.
 - a. For example, *The righteous man is rescued from trouble, and it comes on the wicked instead.* Proverbs 11:8
 - b. Or, in another place, *A righteous man escapes trouble. Pro. 12:13*
 2. We can find many passages like this, mainly in the OT, saying that the righteous are always blessed and only the wicked suffer troubles.
- C. And so we ask, and quite justifiably so, "Hey, what's going on here?"
1. "We are children of God. We have been righteous."
 2. "So why aren't we protected from suffering troubles?"
 3. I can't ask this question without thinking of Miriam Nofsinger, the woman who inspired us to give our second daughter the name Miriam.
 - a. She was an extremely gracious and devout woman.
 - b. Often mentioned her sciatica when I visited in her apartment.
 - c. Finally the pain got bad enough that she had to be hospitalized, and there her "sciatica" was diagnosed as advanced bone cancer.
 - d. She was dismissed from the hospital directly to a nursing home where

she lay in extreme pain for close to 3 years.

(1) Her pain was so severe that I had to abide by certain rules for visiting her.

(2) Stand at foot, not sit by side of bed. Never touch her. Never touch bed. Never ask her how she was.

e. There were many, many times during those years that the question was raised, “Why should it be Miriam who has to go through this? She was always so faithful and devout and righteous and pure.”

D. And that’s exactly the question we’re looking at today—“Why do the righteous experience trouble when the Bible tells us God protects the righteous from troubles?”

III. Aha—To begin to move in the direction of an answer, I would like to point out that the Bible has an alternate and contradictory answer to the question of “What is the relationship between righteousness and trouble?”

A. The place where we find this alternate and contradictory answer presented most clearly is in the book of Job.

1. The question posed by the book of Job is, “Why is Job suffering?”

a. Job’s counselors give the answer we just looked at.

(1) They insist that Job is suffering because he has sinned.

(2) And if he will but repent of his sin, God will forgive him and he will once again be blessed.

b. But Job refuses that simple and easy answer.

(1) Although he doesn’t have an answer to give in its place, he insists, “I am a righteous man.”

(2) “Even though I am suffering terribly, I am a righteous man. It’s not true that the righteous do not experience trouble.”

2. Now after Job and his counselors have taken 37 chapters to debate whether Job is suffering because he has sinned the Lord himself enters the discussion.

a. He refuses to get drawn into the conversation Job and the friends are having about whether Job is righteous or not.

(1) He dismisses the easy answer of the counselors.

(2) And he also dismisses Job’s questions.

b. What he does do is to make a profound statement of his power, sovereignty and wisdom.

(1) *Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God’s and can your voice thunder like his?*

(2) God is saying to Job, “There are things you will never be able to understand. Questions that will never be answered.”

(3) “Accept that. Get over yourself and your questions.”

(4) “And lose yourself in appreciation for who I am.”

c. Job’s response serves as a model for all of us.

(1) *Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.*

(2) In essence Job was saying, as I believe we all need to say, “I

don't need to know the answers. All I need to know is that you are God and you are in charge even if I can't understand why things happen the way they do."

3. The lesson of Job is:
 - a. That troubles sometimes do come to righteous people.
 - b. And that there are no simple answers to "Why?"
 - c. But in the midst of it all, we have a mighty God, and if we cling to Him, we don't need any more answers.

B. We find a second place where this alternate and contradictory teaching comes out in our passage for today, 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.

1. In contrast to the stance that God delivers the righteous from troubles, this passage proclaims that God.....comforts us in all our troubles.
2. That the righteous experience trouble is a given in this passage, and Paul gives no hint of any expectation that God shields them from it.
3. Rather what Paul says is that:
 - a. God comforts the righteous in their troubles.
 - b. And He empowers fellow Christians to stand with those experiencing trouble.

IV. Whee—Now based on these two passages, I would like to make three observations about Christians and troubles.

A. My first observation is that troubles can have a valuable impact on our lives in that they point us from the physical realm to the spiritual realm.

1. This is an important and hard lesson for us modern Americans.
 - a. We have such control over the physical realm that we have become very much at home in it.
 - (1) The physical realm delivers all sort of comforts & luxuries.
 - (2) And we ourselves are able to eliminate many troubles.
 - b. This degree of control over the physical realm has suckered us into thinking that we need look no further for comfort, and so we don't.
 - c. As long as things are going good in the physical realm we don't look to God very much because we're doing just fine on our own.
2. It is the troubles of life that make us look toward God.
 - a. They are a reminder that we need to look up from the physical realm.
 - b. And without that reminder we may never look up at all.
3. In other words, physical troubles can have a strong spiritual benefit.
 - a. I'm thinking of an Old Regular Baptist church service Jeananne and I attended up a holler in Eastern Kentucky one time.
 - (1) People were badly impacted by the poverty of the region.
 - (2) I was struck that several times in that service the pastors referred to life as "a vale of tears."
 - (3) It was out of this "vale of tears" model, which was a new idea to me, that they looked toward God with a great intensity.
 - (4) They had a different mind-set from mine, shaped, I believe, by the fact that they had experienced many more troubles in life.
 - (a) Physical realm had not blessed them.
 - (b) So they had their eyes lifted to the spiritual.

1. True that unrighteousness sometimes does increase troubles—smoking and drunk driving come to mind—but even the most righteous can still experience troubles in life as we saw with Miriam Nofsinger and Paul himself with his thorn in the flesh.
2. But there are Christians who deny this—who insist despite all evidence to the contrary— that God shields the *righteous from all trouble*.
 - a. My sister has a niece who suffered a broken neck six years ago.
 - (1) Esther was a petite, lithe, agile college senior majoring in dance
 - (2) Now it’s all she can do to maintain her balance with a cane.
 - b. But her parents are part of a religious group that insists on the OT understanding that God protects his children from all harm.
 - (1) So they insist that there is nothing wrong with her as she totters along with her cane.
 - (2) They didn’t call Betty and Paul to tell them—nothing wrong.
 - (3) They accepted treatment most reluctantly—nothing wrong.
 - (4) Resisted legal action for covering her medical expenses because she wasn’t really injured—God protects his children.
 - c. It has been a most awkward situation as they have clung to their insistence that God wouldn’t allow this injury to happen to their daughter in the face of dire medical necessity.
3. But both Job and Paul disagree with them.
4. Even the righteous have troubles.
- B. Second, I want to join with God in saying, as he does in Job, don’t allow your questions about why troubles come to Christians to take your mind from a full appreciation of the power and wonder and grace of God.
 1. There are lots of things we may never have answers for.
 2. But God is still God and worthy of praise.
- C. Third, I would like to suggest that we learn to accept troubles as a gift that lifts our sight from the physical to the spiritual.
 1. It’s too bad that it often takes troubles to make us look toward God.
 2. But since it is that way, we can consider troubles as a gift—a hard gift, but a gift nonetheless—that reminds us of God and what he does for us.
- D. Fourth, I want to remind us that troubles are an encouragement to community both:
 1. As they lead us to lay aside our pride and self-sufficiency and accept the care of others....
 2. And also as they lead us to reach out a hand of caring to our brothers and sisters in need.
- E. Fifth, I want to assure us that God comforts us when trouble comes our way.
 1. Can come in a direct mystical sense of God’s love and care.
 2. But it also comes in the care of our brothers and sisters.
 3. We as Christian brothers and sisters are the agents of God to express and extend his care and love to each other.
- F. Troubles come as a gift to help us to lift our eyes from the physical realm to the spiritual realm, and to help us to lift our arms from our own affairs toward each other as brothers and sisters.

- G. And it is in that lifting toward Jesus and the reaching to each other as brothers and sisters that we find the comfort that enables us to endure the troubles of life.