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“In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly,” Job 1:22.

Patience in Suffering

Lesson Aim: To strive to emulate the patience of Job during times of distress.

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“God had one Son without sin, but He has had no son without sorrow.” The old adage is true. Suffering is a common experience among men. It comes to young and old, rich and poor, guilty and innocent.

Multitudes have asked, “Why does God permit suffering?” One person answers, “A person suffers as punishment for some specific sin of which he is aware.”

Another answers, “People suffer because God is unconcerned about them.” The Bible declares, “God permits suffering in order to develop holiness of character in men.” The Bible answer is found in the Book of Job.

Man should not be so concerned with the “why” of human suffering as with “how” to bear it so that it works for increased holiness. The sufferer is instructed to endure his trials without rebellion against God. Admit that God's ways are incomprehensible to men. Admit that God loves and desires what is best for men. Patiently endure whatever hardships come, knowing that God will work them out to the sufferer's good and His own glory.

Suffering requires patience: a manly constancy under trial that comes through personal relationship with God. A patient man will accept delay without depression, suffer opposition without retaliation, and endure suffering without relenting. Patience is not a tangible article; it is a disposition of spirit, an attitude of mind, a manner of life. It is a grace made possible by the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

This study aims to encourage you to exercise patience in the midst of your trials. Ask God to teach you as you study.

I. THE VICTIM OF SUFFERING

Human suffering would be easy to understand, if it came only upon vile sinners in direct relation to their sins. Justice would seem to be vindicated as the wicked receive evil ways.

In many instances, sin does bring a direct retribution of suffering. Genesis 3 records the suffering that came upon Adam and Eve as a consequence of their rebellion in the Garden of Eden. Acts 13 recounts the blinding of Elymas the sorcerer when he withstood the gospel and sought to keep Sergius Paulus, governor of Cyprus, from hearing the good news. Prophets of God declared to Israel and Judah that their political bondage was a direct result of their sin against God. God's Word warns, **“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,”** Galatians 6:7. Sin does bring suffering!

Experience, however, teaches that the righteous suffer as well as sinners. There are some instances where suffering can be traced directly to some sin. There are other instances where suffering comes when there is no known sin. It is at the suffering of the innocent that man is perplexed.

Job was a man who, according to human standards, was holy and righteous. Even God took knowledge of him that he was “perfect and upright . . . one that feared God and eschewed evil,” 1:1. God pointed Job out to Satan saying, “There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil,” 1:8. Yet Job suffered.

Job was marked by personal holiness. He was declared to be a “perfect” man. The Septuagint version of the Old Testament paraphrases that description to mean, “He was a man who was true, blameless, just, pious, abstaining from evil deeds.” The idea seems to be that his piety and moral character were complete in all points, lacking nothing. That is, Job was a man of integrity in all the relations of life.

Being “perfect” in spirit, Job was “upright” in all his actions. (The term “upright” means “straight, level and even.”) Such excellence of character and conduct expressed itself in two ways: (1) He feared God; (2) He departed from and abstained from evil. Yet he suffered.

Suffering does not mean one is a sinner. Neither does it mean that God is acting unjustly. When you enter into an experience of any suffering, commit yourself to Him who does all things well. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday,” Psalm 37:5-6.

II. THE SOURCE OF SUFFERING

Job 1:1-12 makes it clear that all suffering may be attributed to Satan. Examine the record.

“There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them,” verse 6.

Commentators on that passage are almost universally agreed that the “sons of God” are the angelic spirits which do the will of God. They are called “sons” because they were created by God. Among them was an angelic spirit which had become the opponent of God because of his self-love. He is called “Satan” which means “adversary, accuser, opponent.” Where that solemn assembly took place is not mentioned, nor is there indication why Satan was among the good angels on that day of report and reckoning. It is logical that on the day when good angels came to report their ministry among men, the Adversary would be there to oppose their report and accuse men before God.

As the affairs of men were reviewed in that august assembly, God asked Satan, **“Hast thou considered my servant Job . . .?”** Satan replied, accusing Job of serving God because God blessed him: **“Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him . . . on every side . . . put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face,”** verses 9-11.

God responded to the challenge, **“Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand,”** verse 12. So calamity began to fall upon Job, permitted of God but performed by Satan. God uses evil angels to do His will, too, I Kings 22:19-23.

Satan is the cause of all evil in the world. It is in grace that God overrules evil to make it work out for good to His own. Your personal trials are brought by Satan. Keep courage, however, for God sets limits past which the Adversary cannot go in testing you. Trust in God will give you this testimony: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose,” Romans 8:28.

III. THE SORROWS IN SUFFERING

Trials may take many forms. The manifold areas of their testings often make them the harder to bear. Trials often come from several different directions at the same time. Who can keep faith in God at a time like that?

Examine the experience of Job.

One may suffer the loss of wealth, 1:3, 13-17. Job was “the greatest of all the men of the east.” His possessions included seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke (one thousand) of oxen, five hundred female asses, and a very great household. In a culture where wealth was considered in terms of livestock, he was a very wealthy man.

There came a day, however, when all his wealth was swept away. Sabeian raiders came and took the oxen from the field and the asses from the pasture. Fire broke out in the pastureland and destroyed the sheep. Chaldean raiders attacked the keepers of the camels and stole the entire herd. Word of those tragic losses came to Job on the same day. One messenger came with bad news, “and while he was yet speaking,” another came with report of further loss.

How would it fare with you, if your entire material resources were wiped out in a single day? Could you keep faith in the justice of God and remain patient in suffering?

One may suffer the loss of loved ones, 1:18-19. Before Job heard the last report of the loss of his resources, a messenger came with even more grievous news. A severe storm had struck the house where his children were having a banquet. The house was demolished, and all the children were killed. Job experienced the loss of all that was meaningful to him. His wealth was gone. His children were gone. He was left only with faith in God.

One may suffer the loss of health, 2:45. Loss of possessions and of family did not deter Job from the way of utter dependence upon God. Satan proposed another test: loss of health, “**Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life,**” verse 4. Suddenly Job found himself covered with sore boils “from the sole of his foot unto his crown,” verse 7. Constant pain and an unrelenting itch set upon him day and night. There was no position in which he could lie or sit which would afford comfort. Three friends who came to comfort him did not recognize his disfigured countenance. The condition continued for many days, 2:13. The Bible states of Job, “. . . his grief was very great,” 2:13.

One may suffer the loss of sympathetic understanding of family and friends, 2:9-13. Perhaps that is the most serious loss of all. A man can stand almost any trial, if he has the loving support of family and friends. Job lost those, too. His wife advised, “**Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die,**” 2:9. Three of Job's friends heard of his tragedy and came to comfort him. Their conversation was no comfort, however, for they accused Job of having sinned and of reaping the just due for his ways:

“ . . . they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness; reap the same,” 4:8. Poor Job. No one sympathized with him in his troubles.

Job was not the only one who has been baptized in sorrows. Godly men in each generation have sometimes experienced “heaviness through manifold temptations,” I Peter 1:6. Let their response to testings teach you how to bear your sufferings when they come.

IV. THE RIGHT RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

Bear your suffering in conscious recognition of the sovereignty of God, 1:20-21. There is no such thing as “luck” or “chance” for the Christian. God, whom you call “Father,” is in charge of all things. He who notes the sparrow's fall (Matthew 10:26) and numbers the hairs of your head (Matthew 10:27) likewise knows your trial. Never entertain the thought that God has somehow forgotten you or grown negligent of you. He has not!

Recognize that God has given all material possessions which you claim, Deuteronomy 8:17-18. Does not He who gave have the right to take? He does! He may take away the prosperity which He once gave you, but He never does so capriciously. Learn to say with the whole heart, **“ . . . the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord,”** verse 21. Such an act of worship and reverence will not go unnoticed by Him with whom you have to do.

Bear your suffering without charging God with wrong, 2:9-10. Even Job's wife became a tool of the tempter. Why do you suppose Satan caused Job's children to die but left him his wife? Deleitsch has well written, “Job . . . needed not be tried by losing her: he was proved sufficiently by having her.” She became Satan's scourge by which to plague him more acutely than by any other means. She said, “Do not try to be a good man any longer. Blaspheme God with curses and commit suicide,” How was that for sympathetic understanding of a man in great physical and emotional stress?

What a temptation to blame God when things go wrong! “Where is God?” one asks. “Why does He permit this to happen to me? Maybe God does not love me any more! He may have forsaken me!” Not so with Job. Twice the Bible records, **“In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly . . . In all this did not Job sin with his lips,”** 1:22; 2:10. Would you retain your integrity under like circumstances? The study of Job is to teach you patience in sufferings.

V. THE PROFIT OF SUFFERING

Is there really any profit to come from suffering? Oh, yes. That is why God permits trials to come upon His own. The Apostle Peter said that “the trial of your faith” is more precious than gold which perishes because it shall be “found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ,” I Peter 1:7. That sounds profitable, does it not?

There is no record as to how long Job's suffering continued. It must have been a matter of years before he was fully restored to his former prosperity, but Job's prosperity did return: “. . . the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. . . So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning,” 42:10, 12. There was one good which came out of Job's suffering which was of more value than the restoration of twice the wealth which he had previously. Job entered into a new relationship with God! He said, **“I know that thou canst do every thing . . .,”** 42:2. He came to acknowledge the sovereignty of the God of heaven. More than that was his further testimony: **“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee,”** 42:5. What a profit to come from trials!

How much would you be willing to give to know God in the way which Job knew Him following his testings? Job had to surrender wealth, children, pride, declaration of innocence, and everything that he held dear. Through those experiences he learned that when nothing is left except God, He is enough.

Jesus declared, **“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple,”** Luke 14:26,27. That is to say, the Christian must have no commitment superior to his commitment to Jesus Christ. Let the testings come. If they bring a new realization of God's grace and a more intimate relationship with Him, they are profitable beyond estimation. Your trials may be but the shadow of God's wings as He draws near to bless you.

Never accuse God of injustice nor unconcern as He deals with you. He will turn trouble into triumph for one who will yield to His will and rely upon His grace. Suffering is to educate and train. It should never cause rebellion. It should teach one to love God for Himself, not just for His blessings. Remember this saying, “The piety which depends on prosperity is not genuine.” Meet each trial with the assurance, “. . . twas grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me on.”

Questions

1. What is patience?
2. How does tribulation work patience?
3. Why do good men suffer as do evil men?
4. What do you know about the character of Job?
5. Why did Job suffer?
6. What losses came to Job?