

## "Who will show us any good?"

Psalms 3 and 4.

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Trouble of one sort or another is the common lot of man. Eliphaz the Temanite made the assertion that, "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward," (Job 5: 7), and it can hardly be contradicted. The child of God is not accorded any special exemption in this matter. Indeed it would seem that he gets an increased quantity, for he is confronted by opposition from the world, if not persecution, which, in the very nature of things, is unknown by the child of this world. With it however he gets the support of God, and ultimately he will get a salvation equally divine.

Sometimes the child of God is found in a position where he is smarting under trials and sorrows that he has really brought upon his own head. In His holy government God has placed His hand upon him, and he has to reap what he has sown. This perhaps is the severest test of all. When David wrote Psalm 3 he was in this plight, for he was fleeing from Absalom his son. That was perhaps the blackest hour of all his varied history, for its details bore a strongly retributive character. He had sown to the flesh and was now reaping a perfect whirlwind of corruption.

In that dark hour the number of those who troubled him had greatly increased. Many had risen up against him under the leadership of his rebellious son; and again many others there were who discerned the hand of God in it, and hence they concluded, "There is no help for him *in God*."

In this conclusion they were absolutely wrong. Precisely the opposite was true. There was no help for him *anywhere but in God*, as the next two verses show. Jehovah was a shield of protection to him. He was also the One in whom he could make his boast, the One who would lift up his head when men sought to cast him down. To Jehovah he cried, and was heard "out of His holy hill."

In this there is very great comfort for us. How many times have we come under the disciplinary hand of God. Sometimes we may have been conscious of it; though more frequently we may not have realized that we had brought our troubles upon ourselves. Whichever way it may be however, the aim of the devil would be to keep us from turning to God; and he will never lack many to voice his desires and insinuate that God will no longer be on our part: there is no hope or help for us in Him. Let us learn the lesson that this is a lie. David under discipline was not shut out from God, and neither are we.

Someone, however, may wish to tell us that we need not drag the devil into this matter, since as far as they are concerned their conscience works with sufficient acuteness to keep them away from God. That is so of course, if there has not been honest and thorough confession of the sin.

We venture to say that David would never have written thus in Psalm 3, on the occasion of his flight from Absalom, if he had not previously written Psalm 51, as the outpouring of his heart in the confession of his great transgression. But having judged himself, and acknowledged his sin, he was restored to communion with God; and therefore was able to face with confidence in Him the tribulation that came on him according to God's governmental dealings.

Let us then keep short accounts with God. If we sin we have an Advocate with the Father, so our course is to judge ourselves, and confess, when we shall be restored to communion with God, and be able to accept whatever may come upon us in the way of discipline, without losing confidence in Him. Then in the midst of the trouble we may find God to be our Shield and Glory, and ultimately our Deliverer. The

latter part of Psalm 3 gives a beautiful picture of David calm and sustained and unafraid in the midst of his afflictions, and then finally delivered out of them.

But this is by no means all. Psalm 3 is followed by another Psalm of David, which, though not distinguished as being written at the same time, yet follows most appropriately as regards its theme. In it we are enabled to see that his time of trouble led to other desirable things. He gained, (1) spiritual blessing and enlargement for himself; and, (2) capacity for rendering testimony to others.

In the first verse of Psalm 4, we encounter this remarkable statement "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress." The word for "distress" in the original is the same as that for "trouble" in the first verse of Psalm 3. It apparently has in it the thought of straitness, narrowness, pressure.

In Darby's New Translation the words are rendered, "In pressure Thou hast enlarged me." Here indeed is an extraordinary thing. As far as things material go, we should certainly associate in our minds pressure and contraction. A certain substance is placed in a powerful press in process of manufacture. As the result of heavy pressure it is solidified and strengthened. That we understand and expect. But we certainly do not expect to discover it to be *enlarged* by the process, but rather diminished. The working of the spiritual is in this case the opposite of the natural and material.

No "distress" can be otherwise than troublesome and grievous, yet if God takes it into His hands and uses it as a press it greatly enlarges us. Illustrations of this fact abound by the ten thousand in the experiences and lives of God's saints. Trouble in itself does not enlarge: it is going through trouble with God that enlarges. It is when He takes up the trouble and skilfully uses it as a press that the blessing results.

If we understood this more fully we should not be so anxious for a trouble-free life. We should not yearn to be always sailing under blue skies; always walking a smooth road with pleasure as a companion — And this is true even when sorrow comes to us, not as the result of our faithfulness to Christ and His service, but as discipline, the fruit of our own folly and sin.

"I walked a mile with Pleasure,  
She chattered all the way,  
But left me none the wiser  
For all she had to say.  
I walked a mile with Sorrow  
And ne'er a word said she  
But, oh, the things I learned from  
When Sorrow walked with me."

It is experience that counts. In the hours of our distress, that which heretofore had been merely doctrinal now becomes experimental and consequently practical. There is many a thing as to which the youngest and most inexperienced believer can say, I believe that because the Bible affirms it. God has said it and that commands my faith. In after years the same believer, no longer young and inexperienced, is saying, And how fully have I found it to be true; and what enrichment of heart and life has come to me in the proving of it, even though the process of proving it has been a painful one.

Take two well-known Scriptural cases as illustrating this point. The Apostle Peter sadly broke down and denied his Lord. This involved him in painful experiences, culminating in the probing he

underwent at the hands of the Lord Himself, as to his ways and motives, as recorded in John 21. Yet he was enlarged thereby, for being restored himself he was to strengthen his brethren and feed the lambs and sheep of Christ's flock. Moreover he did not fail in either courage or boldness when face-to-face with the foes, as we see in the early chapters of Acts.

Again, consider the case of the Apostle Paul, as he himself presents it in 2 Corinthians 12. The discipline under which he came was preventive and not retributive, but that did not make the "thorn in the flesh," any less trying. "Thorn" is we understand, a rather inadequate word. It should rather be "stake." Now to have a stake driven through one's flesh must be a fearful and crippling business. This Paul had. But by it he learned experimentally that the *grace of Christ* was sufficient for him. He discovered how the *strength of Christ* could be perfected in his weakness. He learned to glory in his infirmities with the *power of Christ* resting upon him.

Come now, what do we know in practical reality of the grace of Christ, the strength of Christ, the power of Christ? Do we know as much as Paul? We do *not* indeed! Why not? Because we do not know much about a stake in our flesh. In our cases, we do probably only have experience of a mere thorn.

Paul, we must remember, had been caught up into the third heaven, where he heard unspeakable things. That must have been a tremendous experience, and brought him amazing enlightenment as to the things of God. But we venture to think that it did not accomplish with him what the stake in the flesh did. In the trying circumstances of weakness and cripplement there was an opportunity for the experience of the grace, the strength and the power of Christ, not afforded amid the glories of the third heaven.

See also, in Psalm 4, how David, enlarged in soul, learned to differentiate between the "godly" and the "sons of men." The sons of men turned his "glory" into shame. Jehovah was David's glory, as the third Psalm has told us. But Jehovah was nothing to them; indeed worse than nothing in their estimation. Vanity was what commended their hearts, and the objects of their pursuit were but a lie. From all that those who feared God were separate.

They were separate, not because they fancied themselves better than others, but because Jehovah had set them apart for Himself. God had claimed them, and just because He claimed them He disciplined them. The sons of men may pursue their vanities and their lies with apparent impunity. They are not dealt with, as God deals with those who are in relationship with Him. They are allowed to heap up judgment to themselves against the coming day of wrath. But God keeps short accounts with His people. And that is why we do well to keep short accounts with Him.

However, the godly are called to render testimony in the presence of the sons of men; and when, like David, they have been reamers in the school of discipline, they are the more qualified to do so.

The pursuit of vanity does not bring any satisfaction to the sons of men. The very reverse. It leaves them sadly discontented, in just the same frame of mind as it left Solomon, who came to the conclusion that all was vanity and vexation of spirit. Consequently their cry is, "Who will show us any good?" They ask that question evidently with the air of those who believe that there is no real answer to it, because no real good is to be found.

Many there were who asked that question, just as there were many who asserted of David that there was no hope for him in God. Pretty clearly both the assertion and the question sprang from the same root of utter unbelief. And without a doubt the many who asserted and asked were *wholly wrong* on both occasions. There *was* help for David in God, and *only there*. Absolute and eternal good *exists*, and there are those who can *show it when challenged*. David accepted the challenge and proceeded to show the good. He not only knew it theoretically, but also experimentally.

In the first place he declares that good is found in the light of Jehovah's countenance. No "good" is to be found in the darkness of this world: to obtain it we must stand in the light of God. David knew this, but how much more ought we to know it, seeing we are in the light of His countenance, fully shining in Christ. In the advent of our Lord Jesus the very face of God has indeed been lifted upon us, and not merely His "back parts" as in the case of Moses. All true good is to be found in the knowledge of God and of Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing surpasses, "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" our Lord, nor will surpass it to all eternity.

The light of Jehovah's countenance was, in a general way, David's answer to the question. However he evidently felt that details of a more particular sort were called for. These details he supplied in the two verses that end our Psalm. As we draw to a close we will note the three things upon which he dwells.

First, there is *gladness*. But take particular note that the gladness of which he speaks comes from God, has its source in God, and consequently is independent of earthly things. It is heart gladness, and not the superficial, frothy article in which the world deals. It was God who put it into the heart of David. We are not surprised therefore to discover it is of the sort that flourishes above all that can be produced by earthly good, the sort that continues when the other fails. In David's day a great deal of the wealth was represented by corn and wine, which thereby became symbolic of the good things of earth. When bountiful harvests caused them to increase it was an occasion of gladness. But the gladness which has its source in the light of God's countenance is far better than that.

A further and greater contrast is furnished in Habakkuk 3. Even when the corn and wine and all else fail, the gladness of heart which is of God *abides*. It is *eternal*.

In the second place there is *peace*: such peace that David could lay himself down and sleep in happy forgetfulness of himself and his troubles. Jehovah was a shield unto him, so why should he not do so? If God cared for him why should he be consumed or distracted with care for himself? This again be it noted, was the fruit of an earlier experience. When many had risen up against him under Absalom's leadership he cried unto the Lord, he was heard, and then in childlike confidence he lay down and slept, and awakened sustained of the Lord. What he had done once he could trustfully do again. And he could testify to the sons of men that he was prepared to do it, no matter what the distress or pressure he was under.

And in the third place there was the *safety* that was guaranteed to him by the presence of the Lord. Men might threaten and imperil, but the Lord, and the Lord alone, made him dwell in safety.

The generation of the disappointed, the discontented, the disillusioned, has not ceased out of the earth. We suspect the rather that it has multiplied amazingly. There are still many who say Who will show us any good? Still they challenge us in this way. Are we ready and glad to answer them? And can we do so out of glad hearts that not only have tasted, but also are in the full enjoyment of the grace of our God?

We can point them to Jesus, the Son of God in whom God is known to us. We can speak of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And then we can tell of the gladness and peace and safety, which have been brought to us by the gospel. Only perhaps we should reverse their order, and speak of safety, peace and gladness. Safety, certainty and enjoyment are indeed the foundation of the "good" which the gospel has brought to us, and of which we gladly testify to others.

And the more we are enlarged under pressure the brighter will our testimony be.