

## Sabbath School Lesson #4 – God and Human Suffering – 15-21 Oct 2016

**C**hrist would have us know that all heaven is interested in our wellbeing. He said, “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof” (Matthew 6:34). We focus on Tuesday section, that the book, “Job, deals with the universal issue of human suffering.”

“Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job” (James 5:11). Yes, we all have heard of the patience of Job, for it has been proverbial for centuries. But we have heard of something else also. Indeed, we never should have heard of Job’s patience if we had not heard of Job’s trials. Many who wish they had Job’s patience forget how he got it. As “tribulation worketh patience” (Romans 5:3), whenever we pray for patience, let us remember what it is that works this Divine grace, and then we shall not be surprised if in answer to the prayer the trial comes which is to develop the grace in our souls.

Some are very apt to talk as though they would be examples of marvelous patience if it were not for the trials they have to endure; it is the trial that makes them hasty of temper and impatient. What a misreading of human experience! It is the trial that works the patience.

But only in Christ Jesus can we have patience. In the life of Jesus we have the Divine example of patience – the highest degree of patience brought out by the sorest trials that humanity ever bore. We are exhorted to “consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:3). It is only by considering His patience that we can be patient. It is important to remember this: that, as all the faith that we have is of Him – “the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12) – so all patience is His. And as His patience comes only by tribulation, it necessarily follows that He bears the trial every time one of His children is called upon to pass through tribulation. The suffering works that sweet grace of patience because Jesus Himself shares in the suffering, bears the infirmity, and His all-sufficient grace bestows upon the tried one His own patience.

Knowing this, a Christian can heartily and joyfully “glory in tribulations also” (Romans 5:3). We know then tribulations are not against us, but for us; that in this experience God is giving us patience, and Jesus is proving His fellowship with us in the suffering. When Job suffered affliction, it was just as true that Jesus suffered with him and strengthened him to patiently endure, as it was that when Israel suffered in the wilderness, “In all their affliction He was afflicted” (Isaiah 63:9). Those who hastily conclude that God allowed affliction to come to Job, and harshly left him to bare it alone, fail to see “the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (James 5:11). Job saw the end that the Lord had in view, and preserved his integrity, and received the gift of the patience of which we all have heard of.

Reading a few Bible texts gives us hope amid trials and tribulations. “Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept Thy Word” (Psalms 119:67). “Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed” (Romans 5:3-5). “Let patience [endurance] have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing” (James 1:4). “Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (James 5:11).

We do well to know that nothing happens by accident in this world. ‘The curse causeless does not come.’ There is no person on this earth ever suffered anything that was not made necessary, either by his own sins or the sins of others. If the suffering was wholly the result of his own sins and errors, it was in the nature of instruction and warning, that he might learn to shun the evil course and its consequences in the future; and so it was a message of peace. And whether the suffering came for his own sins, or wholly because of somebody else’s failure, it was that the sufferer might be filled to assist others in affliction. Even Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, was made “perfect through sufferings,” being in all things “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 2:10,17-18).

Of ancient Israel, we learn that one object of the oppression which the Israelites suffered in Egypt was to teach them mercy. God said to them, “Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow’s raiment to pledge; but thou shalt

remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing” (Deuteronomy 24:17-18). In many places were the Israelites admonished to be merciful, by the memory of what they had suffered in Egypt.

Furthermore, if the children of Israel had never been oppressed, they would never have wanted to leave Egypt. They were situated in the most fertile part of the country, and if they had been left wholly at ease, they would have had no incentive to go to the far better country which the Lord had given them. “As the eagle stirreth up her nest” (Deuteronomy 32:11), throwing the young ones out when they will not of themselves attempt to fly, so the Lord dealt with Israel. Even so it is now. If we had everything to our liking, we should be far less likely to listen to the message of salvation. This is the way it is with those who are “not in trouble as *other* men; neither are they plagued like *other* men,” but who have only prosperity, “pride compasseth them about 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 they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; the increase in riches” (Psalms 73:5-12).

But they stand in slippery places, and shall “be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them” (Proverbs 1:31-32). It is much better, therefore, to be afflicted and saved from ruin, than to have prosperity and go to destruction. We must ever remember that, although God stirs His people out of their nest, He also, like the eagle, beareth them on His wings (Deuteronomy 32:11), as the Lord testified to ancient Israel: “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto Myself (Exodus 19:4).

God defeats world schemes that seek to oppress us: “The children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them. Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew” (Exodus 1:7-12). Truly “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (1 Corinthians 3:19). That “new king,” the first of a new dynasty from Assyria, who “knew not Joseph,” and therefore “without cause” (Isaiah 3:4) oppressed Israel, thought that he was planning very shrewdly; but the very course that he took to crush the numbers and strength of the Israelites only caused them to multiply and grow stronger. It was not simply that God worked an unusual miracle, to defeat the purpose of the heathen king; the truth is that hardship and toil, instead of breaking down the human frame, build up and harden it. Truly, idleness and ease are the foes of health and strength.

But with the luxuries of civilisation, and labour-saving machinery, come unfruitfulness, feebleness of body, and inability to resist disease. There is a practical lesson here for us, not only as a nation, but as individuals. People are taught to think that their benefactors are those who procure them ‘shorter hours of labour,’ and to bring luxuries within their reach and ‘make life easy’ for them. All this is indeed pleasanter for the time, and more acceptable to natural inclination; but if it be a benefit to have a long life of health, then it is questionable whether all the ‘modern conveniences’ are benefits. This is not an apology for oppression; for “he that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker” (Proverbs 14:31); it is a plea for people to exercise a wise selfrestraint, and, like the Apostle Paul, to keep the body under, and “bring it into subjection” (1 Corinthians 9:27). It is, indeed, a fact, that in spite of all the oppression of the poor by capitalists, the most of the real troubles of the poor in every land arise from their own evil habits and lack of desire for self-improvement. Read James 5:1-8, to see how God regards the poor and their oppressors. The only obstacle in the way of the poor is the disbelief in God, and the lack of regard for Him. If they would believe in Him as a present help in trouble, and would heed His commandments, walking in His ways, and would cry to Him, instead of to Parliament, they would see even in their adversity great prosperity.