

Your Trial...Designed In Eternity Past For The Glory Of God

John 11

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If you are familiar with the New Testament Scriptures and you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and you have been saved for any period of time at all, you recognize the reality of trials.

You know, James wrote his epistle to believers who had been scattered abroad because of persecution. And the first thing he mentioned to them was, “Count it all joy,” not if, but “when you fall into various trials,”¹ because the reality is that the trials will be there. And though we are all familiar with trials to one extent or another it is very possible that you have... may not have experienced a trial in the terms of magnitude that you could expect.

You know, you hear of tragedies and you acknowledge that they are horrifying and yet often times we are not moved to a great degree until the tragedy hits home. I mean, think about the world trade center and the 3000 plus people that died in that event and it was horrible in every respect and yet since I was a few thousand miles away and we probably didn't personally know someone involved, any impact was—though it was significant—it obviously wasn't as significant as it could have been.

And if you were to scan these pages in the New Testament beginning with the gospels of the Lord Jesus Christ through the book of Revelation you would see that without exception there is an element of suffering in each book. Suffering is part of the sin cursed world. It is part and parcel with Christianity.

You know, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ said, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation,” but he said, “be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”²

Paul, trying to encourage Timothy says, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions,

¹ James 1:2.

² John 16:33.

afflictions...”³ Notice there is persecutions and afflictions, “which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And [notice] out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”⁴

And so there is tremendous persecution for the believer, potentially, though here in America we have suffered very little of that. And so we could be affected by that, but realistically most of the suffering and trials we come from are really just because we are living in a sin cursed world.

The sufferings mentioned in the Scriptures take various forms. It happens at different levels and degrees. It affects all different kinds of folks and all different stations in life. And we are reminded that suffering is really no respecter of persons. And sometimes when we read of the suffering that takes place in these Scriptures or even in our own lives we will have questions. It is not unusual for a human being to wonder at some point in time when a tragedy strikes for no apparent reason and when things have gone south and when the disappointment is tremendous and the sorrow unbearable, we can ask why? Why is this happening? How can these things be?

At times believers have been known to wrestle with the daunting task of reconciling the love of God with the sorrow of some unjust or undeserved suffering. It is possible, at times like Job to mentally torment ourselves seeking answers. And yet it is not uncommon to have a concrete explanation be elusive. We want one. We grasp for one. Sometimes we think if we can assign a cause or figure this whole thing out that it will help, that we can better deal with what has been placed before us. We sometimes get some satisfaction out of assigning a cause to a calamity. We want to know deep down that the purpose of all this is valid in some way, shape or form.

And so when tragedy strikes it is not uncommon to analyze and reanalyze life events and circumstances and such in an effort to, again, perhaps determine why. Why did this happen? How could it have been avoided. And often in that painful process it is not uncommon to blame someone or something including yourself for things that are ultimately out of your control.

And, you know that is why I in particular this morning and I trust you are as well are thankful for the Scriptures.

Romans chapter 15 and verse four says, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning,” notice “that,” in order that, that is a purpose clause, “that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”⁵

You know, God designed the Scriptures to provide comfort and provide what you need for endurance, especially when it is needed. I like someone I...

³ 2 Timothy 3:10-11.

⁴ 2 Timothy 3:11-12.

⁵ Romans 15:4.

In fact, let me just highlight that, "Patience and comfort of the scriptures."⁶ That is where really the comfort comes.

You know, we are tempted often times to look outside for comfort, to find it in something that really doesn't deliver the goods or certainly might just deliver for a short period of time and it... the eternal living Word of God is designed to comfort you. That is why Psalm 119 at verse 50 the psalmist says, "This is my comfort in my affliction, For [notice] Your word has given me life."⁷

It is the Word of God which is alive and power. It is the Word of God which God has designed to give you what you stand in need of to find comfort in time of trial, when human tragedy strikes home.

You know, as you think of trying to figure out a why we all have a way of thinking that is natural to us and the disciples brought out that way of thinking when they were with their Savior here in John chapter nine.

Notice the first three verses of this chapter.

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed [or made manifest] in him."⁸

You know, the disciples wanted to know why. Why is this individual blind? And they wanted to assign a cause. They wanted to better understand why this man was blind and maybe perhaps they weren't. And yet through faulty human viewpoint they came to the wrong conclusion much like Job's friends thinking surely this was a reap what you sow scenario. The tragedies in one's life are always the result of someone's sin, someone's personal sin, either theirs or someone else's.

The disciples decided, well, someone must have done something wrong here. Either this guy sinned something horrible or his parents or, I mean, why would he be born blind? But they were dead wrong. You know, and that is not an uncommon train of thought. By virtue of the fact that we are sinners living in a sin cursed world and we have all experienced first hand the principle communicated to us in Galatians chapter six which tells us very plainly that when you make dumb, bonehead decisions that you will reap the consequences that go with those decisions.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Psalm 119:50.

⁸ John 9:1-3.

And so in the back of our minds we think, well, wait a minute, man, this must be some kind of a reap what you sow scenario here that... In the deepest recesses of our mind when someone has suffering and it is usually someone else we look at, well, in some small way it must have been deserved, right? He must have had it coming.

And Christ blows that right out of the water. Oh no, he says.

That is how the disciples were thinking and yet it was the farthest thing from the truth. They immediately assume that someone's personal sin was to blame for the tragedy either this man's or his parents and Christ said emphatically no. He made it very clear that this had nothing to do with his parents or him and that Christ put a very important perspective on it that we need to grasp. He said this tragedy here, this blindness was for a much greater purpose. It was so that the works of God could be made manifest or made evident.

His tragedy was going to be used for the glory of God. It is so important to keep in mind.

Go with me to another example, if you would, to Luke. And put a marker here because we are going to come back to John chapter 11 here shortly. Go to Luke chapter 13 and notice these verses here beginning in verse one.

There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."⁹

And then as, "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we have to do..."¹⁰

And they thought since these individuals were the victim of some tragedy at the hands of Pilate that they were worse sinners than everybody else.

What does Christ say?

Absolutely not, absolutely not. In fact, he gives another illustration, verse four.

Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell [a natural disaster] and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.¹¹

⁹ Luke 13:1-3.

¹⁰ Hebrews 4:13.

¹¹ Luke 13:4-5.

Again, the human mind naturally thinks that if someone gets something rotten to them it is because they had it coming. That is not true. That is not true.

Now I am not saying, again, that there are not times when suffering is not directly related to sin and poor decisions, because it is. And that is why we are exhorted to take ourselves as in the doctrine and make decisions that are sound by faith based on principles of the Word of God because we do reap what we sow. But the reality is we live in a sin cursed world and tragedies happen through no one's fault.

You know, Owen was born with some genetic disease that they don't even know what it is. Was that someone's fault? No. We live in a sin cursed world. Greg is bit by some bug and it is ravaging his body. People are born with Downs Syndrome or some other syndrome. Accidents happen.

And going with God there is no such thing as, quote, technically as an accident, but we live in a sin cursed world. Things happen. And Christ again said in verse three as we think of John nine that he ordained in eternity past a significant purpose with that man's blindness. And, you see God wants us to think in those terms.

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ this morning you need to recognize that because of your position in Christ that your life has purpose and value, that God has a plan for it. And he has got a plan for your life and through our life in trials and good times. He has a worthy goal. And that worthy goal... and I know it is hard to believe, it is not about you. It is about him. It is about his glory.

The ultimate goal is for him to glorify himself and you have the privilege of being part of that however he sees fit. God desires to use your life to bring glory to himself. That is the ultimate goal and through it all he has got other goals as well as the Scriptures bear out.

And we are going to go through some things in John 11 here that will bear that out, but before we do, let's go to the book of 1 Peter and look at some truths there, 1 Peter chapter one.

We can pick it up in verse three. It says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope,"¹² he has given us eternal to a living hope, "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."¹³

And what is involved in that hope? Well, that living hope contains which is incorruptible, it is undefiled, it does not fade away, preserved, perfect tense, in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

¹² 1 Peter 1:3.

¹³ Ibid.

And notice verse six. It says, “In this [salvation] you greatly rejoice.”¹⁴

Again, Peter was written to believers who were suffering persecution for their faith and he told them, he says, “You are to greatly rejoice in this salvation.”

And so if you are saved here this morning, the attitude that you should have that irrespective of your circumstances is one of rejoicing.

Now, on the other hand, if you are not saved here this morning, if you haven’t been born again, you have got no real reason to rejoice. I mean, you might have something to rejoice in on a temporal level, but you really have no reason to rejoice at all because you don’t have salvation. Salvation becomes the basis of our rejoicing. That is important to recognize.

The average individual walking down the street—as I had even discussions with a young man at camp regarding this—who thinks of salvation as a reward for being good. And this is how the average person thinks. I mean, when I... it reminds me of when I was golfing years ago and I made this ridiculous 30 foot putt and the guy immediately says, “You must be living right because there is no way that should have gone in there.”

He felt that [?] in because I was living right.

And I said, “If you only knew.”

It is not a reward for being good, but the average individual takes his works and puts them on this side and he takes his sins and he puts them on this side and he is hoping that his works will outweigh his sins. But the reality is that this will never work. It cannot work because the best you have to offer God is a filthy rag and a filthy rag isn’t going to get anything, anything. I mean what can you get for a filthy rag in any arena?

Nothing.

And that is the problem. And the reality is that works are not an adequate payment for sin. If you sin just 10 times a day that is a whopping 3650 sins per year. So if you are four years old that is 146,000 sins. And that is 10 a day. And let’s face it, if you are honest with yourself 10 a day would be a good day, wouldn’t it? It would be a real good day. And assuming one work cancels out one sin this would require 146,000 good works.

I had fun with that one with this kid. I said, “Are you going to tell me that you have done 100,000 good works in your 15 years?”

Well, he wasn’t willing to admit that. But since all our good works equal filthy rags we are all stuck with our sins still on our account and this is where the good news of the gospel comes in and it is based on the love of Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ 1 Peter 1:6.

Ephesians 2:4 says, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...”¹⁵

Romans 5:8 says, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”¹⁶

I want you to recognize that the love of God is associated with the work of Christ in the Bible. The love of God is not associated with an absence of hell which is what people like to emotionally bring. It is Christ’s love demonstrated through Christ’s death and that is important to realize.

God is holy and we are not. And to make it painfully obvious that we are not he gave us these 10 Commandment with a law and said you would evaluate yourself based on God’s holy written standard you would come to the conclusion that he has already state in his Word which tells us in Romans three, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped.”¹⁷

The individual will just cover his mouth and realize that he is guilty before God. And so God never designed the law to save anyone.

Verse 20 says, “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, [or be declared righteous in God’s sight] for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”¹⁸

As you look at the law you come to the conclusion that you are guilty and you deserve God’s justice and God’s justice means we all deserve to go to hell.

Now, that is bad news.

I was talking to some people this week and they told me that hell is never mentioned hardly ever in church any more. It is just plain too negative.

Well, the truth isn’t always pretty and this is God’s justice in action. The wages of sin is death. Death in the Bible means separation and every individual deserves to be separated from God for all eternity because he is a three fold sinner. He is a sinner by position because of Adam. He is a sinner by nature. And, therefore, he is a sinner by practice. And he deserves God’s justice.

But thankfully God is a God of love. And in love he gave us a Savior. God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. So as we think of the work of the cross Jesus Christ went there and unlike you and me he didn’t have any sins. He was the unique God man, sinless in character, perfect in every respect. Had he went to the cross not to die for his sins, but to satisfy the justice of God by dying

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:4.

¹⁶ Romans 5:8.

¹⁷ Romans 3:19.

¹⁸ Romans 3:20.

in your place. And so he went to die in your place to pay for your sins because someone has to pay. And if an individual wants to pay off his own sins, he will have to spend all eternity in hell doing it.

But God doesn't want that. In fact, the second last thing he cried out before he gave up the ghost is, "It is finished,"¹⁹ which means paid in full. Your sin, my sin, the sin of every human being was once and for all paid for by the Savior. God's justice was propitiated. Salvation is not freely offered for an individual that will transfer his faith or trust from that which would be his church or himself, his baptism or something else, to the only one who can. Because Christ himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."²⁰

And in doing so that individual has the assurance that when he dies he will be welcomed into heaven by the very arms of his Savior himself.

And so the deal that Jesus Christ offers everyone is this. You can receive eternal life for free and escape the horrors of hell if you are willing at a point in time to put 100 percent of your trust in Christ and his death for your sins and that it is guaranteed. And in doing so you have got every reason to rejoice. That is what it is all about, salvation.

However, as we look at verse six here again it says in this salvation, this inheritance and heaven and so forth, we greatly rejoice. Then we have the word "though" or "but." Now, in the nasty now and now, for a little while, temporarily, if need be, that means only if it is necessary, what? You have been grieved through various trials.

In the nasty now and now we will get trials and those trials are grieving. They are sorrowful. The word grieve there means to put pressure, intense emotional pressure on you. And God gives trials only on an as needed basis. They are not arbitrary. They are specifically designed to you and though much pressures is involved and difficulty and so forth, God communicates something very important in verse seven that he wants you and I to know. There is a purpose before it. That genuineness, that is a bad translation. It really carries the idea of approval. The approval of the testing "of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire..."²¹

This is not a trip down the primrose path.

...may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.²²

¹⁹ John 19:30.

²⁰ John 14:6.

²¹ 1 Peter 1:7.

²² 1 Peter 1:7-9.

God has designed trials not only to bring honor and glory to him, but if you go through that trial and you trust him in that trial and you allow him to work in you and through you in that trial you are going to receive praise from God because you were willing to be approved through the trial.

Now isn't that worth it?

No. I want an easy life, thank you.

That is now how God designed. The goal of your trying your faith is to bring honor and glory to the Savior [?]. And let me hear praise from him.

And so you have got to realize that your trial, whatever it might be, has been designed in eternity past for the glory of God and John 11 brings that out and so why don't we go there now? John chapter 11.

We are going to see some principles that are... that we can, as believers in Christ, take great comfort in. And we are going to see in this chapter how God uses trials to bring glory to himself, but before we dig into this ask yourself this question. How do you expect God to respond to your trials? And then, secondly, how does God expect you to respond to your trials?

We all have expectations and this chapter will bring out some of those things.

Now let's pick it up in verse one.

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. herefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.²³

That is interesting.

Now, the first principle we need to see here is in time of trial you need to call for the Savior. Isn't that what Martha and Mary did? In time of trouble what did they do? They called for the Savior. And that is exactly what we are to do. We are to call for him. That

²³ John 11:1-6.

is why Psalm 55 and verse 22 says, “Cast your burden on the LORD, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.”²⁴

The word “cast” there was used in wrestling matches for when someone slammed someone else onto the mat. You are to slam your burden on the Lord as it were because he shall sustain you. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.

Now as you think of the sickness here there is nothing mentioned here about the cause or what it is, but we can assume that this is consistent with what we read in John nine earlier that life has got tragedies in it or Luke 13. We can assume this cause of this sickness was not sin, but even if it were it is known by all that Jesus loved Lazarus, is it not?

But what is noteworthy here is that in a time of serious need they went to the Savior. Now there might be a number of things that are good to do in a time of trial, but the thing that you really must do is to go to the Savior, to call for him. And even, say, friend, if you are in at a time of [?] you notice that too often we want an instant solution to our problem. We want a solution on our timetable on our terms and we usually want a human solution. We seek a human solution to our problem and then if all else fails, well, I guess I will go to the Savior. I mean some got the idea that they are actually bothering him with their life or something.

But more often than not we don't go to the Savior because we simply don't believe it is going to make a difference.

And, you know, the unfortunate thing is some have never allowed a trial to drive them to Christ because they keep interrupting the process with some kind of a human solution they are trying to fix. And we need to recognize that when you look to a human source or an earthly source as a means of deliverance that it will surely disappoint. It will surely result in a let down. Almost everyone I know who is bitter is bitter because they had an unrealistic or an unbiblical expectation of another person or of God. And they put their faith in their unreliable object. And though it wasn't stated outwardly they demanded that God deliver them on their terms or they put a burden for their happiness on someone else instead of casting their burden on the Lord and thanking God for his faithfulness and they became bitter.

You know, if you are trusting... if you are putting the burden of your happiness on someone else, I want to tell you right now you couldn't be any further wrong. No one else is responsible for your happiness. And if you think they are, you are nuts because they are going to disappoint you. I mean, who can live up to that expectation?

You have got the Savior. That is why people get bitter. Someone else let them down. And I am not saying people don't let you down. That is not my point. The point is that God's grace is sufficient and no one else is responsible for your happiness.

²⁴ Psalm 55:22.

Now it is interesting. They called for the Savior, but they didn't ask him to do anything. They simply made him aware of their need knowing that because he loves them and he cares for them and their brother that he will respond appropriately. And so that is really an amazing display of faith. They went to the Lord and they trusted that he would do his... what is best. But that doesn't mean their faith would not be tested. It doesn't mean their faith would not be expanded. It doesn't mean that God would act in a way that they thought he should.

I can't help but think the sisters probably concluded that Jesus would come immediately in light of the love that he had for Lazarus. I mean, which one of us upon hearing that the one we love—our children for example—were in dire straits, would we not at once drop what we are doing and run to them?

Well, sure we would. And often times we think, well, God is going to do the same. But how did Christ respond?

Well, it says here in verse six, "When He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was."²⁵

You know, Christ made this clear. He says in verse four, "This sickness is not unto death."²⁶

Now that doesn't mean Lazarus wasn't going to die because he is. It is talking about the final outcome of that trial. But he said more importantly this is, "for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."²⁷ This is what this is about. It is about the Son of God being glorified in the trials. So what does he say in verse five?

Jesus loved... or what is said is, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."²⁸

But when he heard that, notice, he stayed two more days. You know, the sisters appealed to Jesus on the basis of what they knew regarding Christ's love for Lazarus. In verse five John tells us plainly that Christ loved Lazarus.

The Spirit of God goes out of the way to make us understand that God loved Lazarus and his sisters. But he does not rush to their side because his utmost concern was for the glory of God. And so principle number two is that God uses your trial to glorify himself. That takes precedence.

The human viewpoint says, "This is an awful tragedy. This is horrible. We need to get this thing fixed right now."

²⁵ John 11:6.

²⁶ John 11:4.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ John 11:5.

And yet this awful experience from a human viewpoint was designed by God to bring glory to God and glory to the Savior. And we can be encouraged when heartache comes, tragedy comes our way that not only will God cause it to work together for good, but he will design the process of the trial—and every trial is a process—to bring honor and glory to Christ.

You know, one thing that you need to learn even in your trials is that it is not about you. It is about the Savior. And though it was apparent that this was an emergency, Christ paused. He waited two more days.

Again, after the Holy Spirit makes the very clear to us that Christ loved him.

So the sisters do the right thing. They call upon the Savior in time of trouble. Christ is both willing and able to help them and yet he didn't drop what he was doing to run to their side. But, you know, we will see here as we look at the rest of the chapter that God had a plan because God always has a plan and he is never late.

And it reminds us of the third principle. Though God loves you supremely, he will not prevent the trial, but allow the trial to come to pass.

A lot of times we think, well, if God really loved me he wouldn't let this happen to me. No, because God loved you he is going to let things happen to you. You have got to remember this principle right here.

What then? Romans 8:31-21. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"²⁹

And God is for you. How do we know? Verse 32. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all..."³⁰ I mean, if that isn't the ultimate demonstration of love what is?

"How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"³¹

God loves you, but it is really not about you and so Christ paused and is this not when the seeds of doubt enter in, when God does not come to our rescue in what we consider a timely manner? Is this not when we begin to question the goodness of God when tragedy strikes and it is unthinkable in its severity, the pain, the heartache, the stress and deliverance is not immediate nor apparent. Isn't that when the evil thoughts enter in, the question? Doesn't God love me anymore?

Your faith is being tested. And this is where you as a believer must not measure God's love by your circumstances, but measure your circumstances by God's love.

²⁹ Romans 8:31.

³⁰ Romans 8:32.

³¹ Ibid.

You know, God's delays are not God's denials. If our prayers are not answered immediately, if deliverance is not instantaneous he is teaching us to wait. And if we wait patiently we will find that he will answer our prayers in a much more marvelous way than we ever anticipated nor imagined. Not even Christ's love for Martha, Mary or Lazarus could force Christ to act ahead of the proper time. Everything Christ did was in obedience to his Father's will. There is a divine timetable to everything and there is a divine timetable right here in John chapter 11. And the key to victory, especially when the trial is gut wrenching, is to really believe a promise we all know usually very well. We know... we don't guess, we know, that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. That is the belief. We know it.

And so the key is to have an unshaken confidence in the internal stability of the love of Christ when circumstantially everything else seems to be trumpeting out the opposite.

That is the secret to success in trial. Let nothing shake your confidence in the unalterable love of your Lord. When everything goes down the tubes you need to recognize that God makes no mistake. It is the key to victory in a trial. It is the key to growth as a believer. It is holding firm to the fact that he doesn't ever make a mistake.

You know, the Hebrews were under severe trial and what was... what does the writer admonish them to do? Don't cast away your confidence which has great reward. That reward, however is in heaven.

For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.³²

Just wait. It will be worth it all when you see Jesus.

You know, and part of that reward in time in seeing God glorified is you are willing to wait on him by faith. God made his goal clear in John 11. It was for the glory of God which means Romans 8:28 will be vindicated.

And Isaiah 49:23 says they that wait for him will not be ashamed.

When you measure God's love by your circumstances, invariably you will draw the wrong conclusion. That is just the way it is. But when you have in the deepest recesses of your mind God's glory, though the storm rages, you will stand squarely on the unfailing promise of God.

Christ promised this. There is no testing or temptation, either or, "has overtaken you except such as is common to man."³³

³² Hebrews 10:36-37.

³³ 1 Corinthians 10:13.

What you are going through is not unique. Others have gone through it. “But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”³⁴

Now if this isn't true then John 3:16 isn't true. You can tear them both out of your Bible.

See, God never gives you no more than you can handle, but he never gives you any less than you need. An easy life teaches nothing and so you need to learn to wait by faith.

That is why David said this. “I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living.”³⁵

[?] but he said now.

“Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!”³⁶

Will you wait for his timing and his plan so that his love will be manifested at the right time and at the right place for his honor and glory? It will be worth it all. God's ways are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways. His love is not our love. Our love is short sighted. It is conditional. It is limited and so forth. God's love sees the beginning from the end. And it makes no mistake. And so when David was thinking correctly he said, “My soul, wait silently for God alone, For my expectation is from Him.”³⁷

You know, if you look at the Psalms, David did not have a rosy life. It was trial after trial after trial. And then he self inflicted trials on top it. But when you are waiting upon the Lord you will rest in your trial. You will rest in the character of God who saved you from an eternal hell fire and that is principle number four. God will be true to his character in any and every trial.

You know, one thing that you need to have a firm grasp on in every trial is God's sovereignty and his righteousness. God's sovereignty says, “Since I own everything I can do anything I want any time I feel like doing it because it is all mine anyway.”

But God always acts correct. He is always operating righteously. God is in control here. Christ is in control of this whole situation here. God is sovereign and he is righteous. And so in the most severe trial one must recognize that God makes no mistakes, nothing happens by chance.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Psalm 27:13.

³⁶ Psalm 27:14.

³⁷ Psalm 62:5.

Ephesians 1:11 tells us, “In Him [in Christ] also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him [notice] who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”³⁸

How much is God in control of? How about all things. And so you need to recognize his sovereignty, his faithfulness, his immutability and his love. God can't not treat you in love because of his Son.

That is why Job who endured on a human level about the worst thing you can in many respects, things we hold dear, lost it all. He said after it happened he said he arose, he tore his robe, he shaved his head, he fell to the ground and he whined.

No. He worshipped. I mean, which one of us having losing your family and your possessions would stop and say, “Thanks, God”?

He said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb.”³⁹

Guess what? Naked I am going to go back. The Lord has given. The Lord has the right to take it away. He has taken it away. But guess what? Blessed be his name because I am his, he is mine. He knows what is going on. He calls the shots. I am going to let him run the show.

Job's understanding of the almighty caused him to say these very words. He knew that God made no mistake. This is a verse I have claimed many times in trial because I like what it says.

“I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.”⁴⁰

In faithfulness God afflicts. You know, when I need to be afflicted he is faithful to afflict me because I wander like a dumb sheep when I don't have a trial. I need a trial to keep me thinking straight. I need a trial just about every day because I am a bonehead and I wander away.

But, boy, I am thankful that he is faithful.

You know, it would have been nothing for Christ to say the Word and Lazarus would be healed, but he didn't because there was something far greater going on behind the scenes that God wanted to accomplish.

Well, let's go on or we are going to be here until Christmas.

Verse eight. “The disciples said to Him, ‘Rabbi’”⁴¹

³⁸ Ephesians 1:11.

³⁹ Job 1:21.

⁴⁰ Psalm 119:75.

Well, verse seven says:

Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?"

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." These things He said...⁴²

Well, let's just stop for a second there. What he is saying is, "Listen. I am doing the will of God."

I will just give you a quick thing here.

When you are walking in the light of the will of God you are immortal until God decides it is time to take you home. That is really what he is saying here. And he saying, you know what? I am going to walk... I am doing the will of God here. This is what my Father want me to do and that is exactly what I am going to do. I am not going to like the potential for danger thwart me from doing what god wants me to do. And that is what he did.

Now, we are going to see here principle number five that God will use your trial for the spiritual betterment of others.

Notice verse 11.

These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."

Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well."

However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."

Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."⁴³

⁴¹ John 11:8.

⁴² John 11:7-11.

⁴³ John 11:11-16.

I just don't... what an encouragement he is, right? Let's just all go and die.

But, you see, God had a purpose in here. God had a purpose for the disciples here, did he not? These disciples are not directly involved in the trial, but they are going to benefit from it. And, you know, you have got to remember. Your trials aren't just for you. You know, years ago I had a woman tell me somewhat bitterly why as her mother had Alzheimer's and was in a nursing home and everything else. She said, "Why doesn't God just take her home?"

And I said, "Well, because maybe he wants to teach you patience."

And she had to go over there and take care of her mother on a regular basis. I said, "You know, it is not about your mother. It is about the Lord and maybe the Lord wants to use your mother in these dire straits to teach you something."

And God is going to use this trial to teach the disciples something because guess what? They need to grow. They need to grow and that is why principle six is God's timing, his working and delivering in your trials such as that your faith can be strengthened.

You know, Jesus says here in verse 15. "Boy, I am glad for your sakes that I wasn't there."

Now he wasn't glad for the trial, but he was glad for their sakes that he wasn't there and the reason he was glad he wasn't there is because no one ever died in the presence of Christ when he walked on the earth. And the disciples are actually going to see something... a greater miracle than the prevention of death. They are going to see a man raised from the dead. And in doing so their faith would be strengthened. And so Christ says, "I am glad for your sakes that I wasn't there because you are going to grow through this trial."

You know and that is a perspective we don't normally see, glad for the trial.

But you are not really glad for the trial. You are ultimately glad for the outcome of the trial.

He knew when the trial would run its course that their faith would be strengthened. And so it is with you and me. And that is why James, as I already mentioned, tells us to, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials,"⁴⁴ because it is the outcome of the trial that is in view.

Christ like character that will result when we are exercised by that trial. Our trials are not in vain. They have got an objective and purpose in our lives. They work together for good. And therefore God's timing, his working and delivering in your trial has a purpose, a secondary purpose of strengthening your faith.

⁴⁴ James 1:2.

Let's read on. Verse 17. It says:

So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."⁴⁵

Now not only did the disciples need to have their faith expanded, so did Martha. Martha was established in the faith, but, again, trials are to cause you to grow. It was faith that enabled Martha to recognize that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus from dying. But she still needed to understand more because she thought Christ could only have prevented Lazarus' death if he had been present.

"If you would have been here, he wouldn't have died."

She did not realize that Jesus Christ doesn't need to be there. He can heal anybody from anywhere. Nor did she realize that he could raise the dead. And so her understanding of God and her faith in his ability needed to be expanded just like ours.

You know, and often times of sorrow we talk just like Martha because notice the word "if" there.

If things would have been different, then this wouldn't have happened. If I would have done this or if I would have done that. If I would have gone to the doctor sooner or if I would have been there or if I would have gone bowling instead of to this store or whatever it might be, if I would have stayed home. You could if yourself to death.

You know, God is bigger than your ifs. God is on the throne. He knows what you are going to do. He is orchestrating life around all of our decisions. All of our lives are in the hands of the holy one and nothing happens to one of us apart from his own permission.

You know, the way she said this was like, well, if I were God I wouldn't have let him die. You got that, God?

No.

Isn't that how we dictate to God sometimes? I want to be God. I have got a will in this matter, God, and why don't you do it my way because I... I have got it all figured out. Right?

⁴⁵ John 11:17-22.

You know? Martha had faith here. She did not know how the Lord Jesus would help, but she believed that he would. She had confidence that God would grant him his request, that he would bring good out of this seeming tragedy and that is faith that... faith can be strengthened and expanded when [?] Word of God specifically which will happen.

All right, principle number seven is truth can be established, reaffirmed and expanded through your trials.

Verse 23.

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."⁴⁶

You know, Martha was already saved. But Christ took time to reaffirm the truth of salvation and then expand on it. Now did Christ know she was saved? Of course he did. But he used the situation to reaffirm the truth and then build on it because all Christian life truth springs from the gospel of grace. And so you start at the gospel which is exactly what Christ did and that is exactly what I do. I start at the gospel because that is where everything starts.

So our position in Christ and the riches we have in him.

You know, one of the reasons God allows trials, even severe ones is so that truths you might even already know can be reaffirmed and that new truth can be understood and assimilated into your thinking which results in growth.

That is why David said in Psalm 119 and verse 67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word."⁴⁷

Apart from that trial I was wandering in no man's land, but that trial brought me back to the Word of God.

What does he say a few verses later?

⁴⁶ John 11:23-27.

⁴⁷ Psalm 119:67.

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, [Why?] That I may learn Your statutes.”⁴⁸

Is that your perspective on a trial?

In order to learn about God and life, suffering is a required course in God’s school. And you can’t CLEP out of it. You have got to go through the class because an easy life teaches nothing.

And so Christ used this trial to teach Martha some truth she would have otherwise missed. It was ultimately for her spiritual benefit as well as the disciples and that is God’s objective with you and me because he is molding a masterpiece. He is seeing to conform you in an image of Jesus Christ and apart from suffering and trials it will not happen.

But, you know, with the trial comes comfort.

Verse 28.

And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you."

As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there."

Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.⁴⁹

And that word for groaning there in Greek is an intense internal groaning.

Troubled means to be deeply agitated.

And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"⁵⁰

This wasn’t just a sniffle. This was a serious weeping based on love.

⁴⁸ Psalm 119:71.

⁴⁹ John 11:28-33.

⁵⁰ John 11:34-36.

“And some of them said, ‘Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?’”⁵¹

Now what is important to recognize here is our next principle. Christ knows your pain and sorrow and trial and he grieves with you. No one has more compassion for you than the Savior. This is one of the three times in the New Testament that Jesus wept and this is thrilling evidence of his true humanity. These are real tears of grief that he is shedding here.

Everyone knew that Jesus loved Lazarus. No one would argue that Christ did not love Martha and Mary yet he did not see fit to rush to their side immediately and at the same time he knew every ounce and pain of sorrow that they were suffering. He knew it perfectly. And he was weeping with them. He felt their pain.

And that is true of you and me.

Hebrews 4:15 and 16 says, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”⁵²

He is the perfect empathizer.

You know, Jesus Christ never lets his children suffer alone, never. So what does he say here? He says, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace.”⁵³ Come with great confidence, “that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”⁵⁴

Don’t think for a second that Christ doesn’t know your pain. He knows it intimately and he cares immensely. But, you see, God had a plan.

Principle number nine here. God will use your trial to encourage others to believe the gospel

Verse 38.

Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."⁵⁵

⁵¹ John 11:37.

⁵² Hebrews 4:15.

⁵³ Hebrews 4:16.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ John 11:38-39.

Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha. What are we going to do with you, right?

Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me."

Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."⁵⁶

Notice verse 45.

"Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him."⁵⁷

God allowed all this thing to happen so that other would believe on him. Now isn't that a good reason to go through a trial?

You know, Christ prayed that through the trial that subsequent of action that many would believe on him. And, you know, when you respond in faith in that trial, resting in God's purposes and his faithfulness in that trial, that provides a platform in which the gospel can go forth and lift because your life bears witness that you have got a God who knows what he is doing. Isn't that what we are encouraged to do in 1 Peter three?

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."⁵⁸

Why are they going to ask? They are only going to ask because they see that you have got some internal fortitude by the grace of God that they don't have, that having a good conscience though they would defame you as an evil doer because you are nothing but a low life Christian, those who revile your good conscience in Christ will be ashamed for it is better if the will of God is what it is to suffer for doing good than evil doing.

You know, God wants you to be ready. He is going to allow trials to come so that as you are thinking straight, as you are thinking, as you are collapsing by faith in who he is and what he is doing and that he makes no mistake and you are rejoicing in your salvation though you are in a grievous trial, he is going to provide a platform for you to share with

⁵⁶ John 11:40-44.

⁵⁷ John 11:45.

⁵⁸ 1 Peter 3:15.

others the good news of the gospel because by God's grace you are weathering the storm and they know that you have got something they don't got and they are saying, "What is going on here?"

And that is true in any trial that you are willing to respond to the Savior and see his hand in it.

God had an objective here, wasn't it? To cause others to believe the gospel. Boy. It is amazing that Christ knows what he is doing, isn't it?

But, you know, it doesn't end there. And this is principle number 10. When you are willing to believe you will see God glorified in your trial.

What did Christ say to Martha?

Verse 39.

Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"⁵⁹

That is the problem, is it not? We just don't believe.

I am always encouraged by Romans 4:19 through 21.

And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver [he did not cast doubt] at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith.⁶⁰

And when the dust settled and the smoke cleared, what did he do? He gave glory to God because he was, "fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform."⁶¹

You know, when you are fully convinced that God knows what he is doing and that what he has promised he is able also to perform, you can allow this trial to work itself out in a way that honors him and the way that he is glorified because that is what it is all about.

⁵⁹ John 11:39-40.

⁶⁰ Romans 4:19-20.

⁶¹ Romans 4:21.

You know, when it comes to Christianity believing is required to see. In every other realm seeing is believing. In God's realm you need to believe in order to see and do you know what? We don't do very well walking by faith. We don't really believe often times that the eternal things that the Word of God says are real and therefore we bog down and we get bitter and we get angry and we get whatever, I mean, whatever it is.

And then God says, "I will be faithful to honor my promise."

God is for you. No one can be against you. All things work together for good. He never gives you more than you can handle and he never gives you anything less than what you need. And yet Christ never fails at a trusting heart of his child.

Why? Because he cannot deny himself.

He delights to take occasion in our troubles to illustrate his tender care and his loving kindness. Though at first glance it looks like the exact opposite.

Do you know this verse? Isaiah 30:18, "Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you."⁶²

A lot of times we think, well, how is this God being gracious? Why is he waiting?

He is waiting so he can be gracious to you.

"And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; Blessed are all those who wait for Him."⁶³

Are you willing to wait? God is not in a hurry. He has got his own wise ends in view. The question always becomes: Will you wait upon him because he makes everything plain in time.

What we need to keep in mind is that in God's dealings with this world we live in and with you as an individual that his glory takes precedence always. I am sure there's some that said, "Well, Christ would have done better if he would have prevented the death of Lazarus." And sometimes we think, well, God would have done better if he would have prevented the trial.

No. God did what was best through the trial. He had a higher objective in view.

You know, God is sovereign and he is and he loves you and he does. What he seeks to bring into your life and how he wants to use it can't be improved upon. His objective is to have himself glorified and you have the privilege of being a part of it. And that is why trials are a test of one's faith.

⁶² Isaiah 38:18.

⁶³ Ibid.

And so how do you view your trials? Do you blame others for not coming to your rescue because you fail to see the hand of God?

You know if that is your perspective you will never grow. You will certainly never be an encouragement to others because you have never allowed the God of all comfort to deliver you on his timetable.

You know, it says right there in 2 Corinthians that the God of all comfort, the father of all mercies will provide comfort so that you can comfort someone else in another situation. But if you are not willing to go through the trial and you are bitter and angry at God and all the rest of it. What do you have go to offer anyone else?

Nothing, nothing of value.

I mean, what a privilege it is to go through a trial to see the Father of mercies do exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ask or think.

And so God designed that blindness in John nine in eternity past so that the works of God could be manifest.

God designed this death of Lazarus and the resurrection of Lazarus in eternity past so that Christ could be glorified because he said right there in verse four that the whole purpose of this is that God would be glorified and the Son of God would be glorified through it.

And do you know what he is doing with your trials? The same thing, the same thing. Your trials have been designed by God in eternity past to bring honor and glory to him. Does it hurt? Well, of course it hurts. I wouldn't be a trial.

And do you know what? He decides what we go through and some things, I mean, we look at it and say some people get more than their share than others and that is very obvious. And most of us have been handed a pretty easy road, realistically. Some of us not.

But we need to recognize who our God is.

This poem that is on my wall in my office says,

My Father's way may twist and turn.
My heart may throb and ache.
But I my soul I am glad I know,
He maketh no mistake.

My cherished plans may go astray,
My hopes may fade away,
But still I will trust my Lord to lead,
For he doth know the way.

The night be dark and it may seem
The day will never break.
I'll pin my faith, my all on Him,
He maketh no mistake.

There's so much now I cannot see.
My eyesight far too dim,
But come my way I'll simply trust
And leave it all to him.

For by and by the mist will lift
And plain it all he'll make
Through all the way though dark to me
He made not one mistake.

And so how do you expect God to respond to your trials? Is he God or do you want to be God?

Do you believe that he is in control, that he loves you with an everlasting love, that he has got this thing all figured out, that it will be worth it all when you see Jesus and so that you are willing to wait upon him?

How does God expect you to respond to your trials? They that wait for him will not be disappointed. They won't be ashamed.

If you are willing to believe, you will see the glory of God.

Your times, my times are in his hands. There is no better place than in the hands of the holy one and every believer is firmly there forever. And so when the trials come—and obviously they will—you can say, “Hey, boy, am I thankful I have got a God who knows the end from the beginning. He has got it all worked out. I am going to pin my all on him.”

Let's pray.

What a privilege it is for us to come to an amazing God that loved us when we were his enemies, so unworthy. When we were still sinners Christ died for us. And we know that we are forever in your hands, that you make no mistake, that you do all things well, that we can rejoice evermore and we can look forward to that day in which we are going home and that all the hassles will be over.

I pray that we would not cast away our confidence which has a great recompense of reward, that we would see your loving hand in all that comes our way, that we would have thankful hearts, that we would want to see how you want to pull this thing off for

your honor and glory, that we would train our minds to think like this so that you could even use us to glorify yourself in however you see fit.

I pray that these truths really become a part of the fabric of our thinking and that we would just delight in our Savior and, therefore, honor him through life and lip all by the grace of God and all to the glory of God. It is in Christ's name we pray. Amen.