

IN THE POTTER'S HANDS

By

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There are a growing number of people who profess Christian faith but who no longer see themselves as the light of the world nor find joy in giving honor and obedience to God. The sharp edge of faith has receded being driven back by the grizzly onslaughts of daily difficulties. They ask, "Why has God let this happen to me? Why doesn't He answer my prayers for help? Have I not done my best to be a Christian? Have I not worked hard to serve Him? And in return I get this sickness, this hardship, this loss, this pain, this tragedy?" They no longer pray with expectation, and instead of being filled with peace and joy they are burdened with hardship and anxiety.

WRONG EXPECTATIONS. Often one's great expectations are the wrong expectations. In our generation it has been common for evangelists to use all kinds of bait and promises to get people to respond to their invitations to walk the isles and make their "decision" for Christ. The promise, healing, prosperity, happiness, and a safe harbor from the storms of life. But what did Jesus promise?

He did not promise that his disciples would feel no heat in summer and no cold in winter. He did not promise that we would never be hungry or thirsty or grow tired and weary. He never promised to protect us from accidents and hardship, and he didn't promise to give us bodies of radiant health. He did not promise to protect us from the angry barbs of hate from those who despise us.

Jesus called the disciples to follow him while living in a world that is filled with sin, strife, injustice, disease and evil. No one should be expected to be shielded from the pain and grief that surrounds him because of the fact that he is a believer. Rather he should expect the opposite. Jesus calls his followers to bear a cross and to share the burden of the world's ills, just as he did.

Jesus promised that by following him one would find foes even in his own household (Matt. 10:36). What better place to begin practicing humility and turning the other cheek than in one's own home? It is while enduring severe trials that a Christian may show family and friends that such trials do not quench our faith nor dim the light of hope which we hold.

Didn't Jesus say that the "disciple is not above his teacher nor a servant above his lord," and that if the master has been persecuted "how much more those of his household?" To submit to Jesus as master means we are also to expect the kind of treatment he experienced.

Didn't he warn, "You shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" (Matt. 10:22)? This was said specifically to the disciples who were persecuted by the Jews prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but it also applies to us today.

What Yahweh wants from us is humility and obedience, that He might mold us into His own image. The process may involve tribulation, persecution, a cross to bear, the world's hatred the Lord's chastening, wrenching temptations and fiery trials.

We have no reason to expect to be untouched by the hardships and pain under which the whole creation groans, but we can expect God to be with us, to give us the strength to endure and to profit from it all.

BLESSED BY BAD THINGS. Bad things are going to happen to the best of us. But we can address such things the way Joseph addressed his brothers concerning the tragedy that befell him when they sold him into slavery: "You meant evil against me," he said. "But God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20).

Suffering is our teacher. David sang, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I may learn thy statutes" (Psalm 119:71). David was a chosen vessel of God as king and prophet, yet he endured tragedy, severe opposition and deep personal grief. From this he learned to give up his pride, his ego, his rights, and to humble himself before God and the people he ruled.

Sometimes hardship and suffering are the only things that persuade us to give up our pride and stubborn demands for our own way, that we may become clay in the Potter's hands. The Potter lets us go through the cleansing – as if by fire – until all the lumps of pride and ego are melted away before He can mold us to His design.

Many reading these lines may wish that they had learned the lesson of faith and obedience much earlier, thus avoiding years of sorrow for themselves and for others. But even after sin is forgiven, its deceitfulness and its habits are often so deeply imbedded in the human breast that to remove them requires surgery by years of affliction, and that without an anesthetic.

When I consider the past, I regret its mistakes, sins and bad judgments. But had there been no trouble and trials, what would I now be without the lessons learned? Trouble has been good for me, and in the very worst of times God did not forsake me but drew me closer and showed me His love and grace. Trouble is the fire that melts out the dross and burns up the scaffolding of self reliance so that one no longer trusts his own power but must trust life completely to God. That's when the Potter does His greatest work.

Jesus calls us to deny self, to die to self, and live unto Him (2 Cor .5:14-15). A dead person has no fear of affliction and trouble, and when at last we are able to "put to death the old man" the things we once thought to be adversities are seen as part of the process by which the Potter fashions the clay to the desired image.

Such is the meaning of faith. As I have expressed it elsewhere: “This is faith, to know that God is in all, through all, and over all, so that the present burden and suffering is a part of the plan. This sickness and disease may result in death. This suffering may become more intense. The difficulties do not always pass! But this does not negate the faith of one who believes God, for he believes that the sickness and suffering in themselves are working for the purpose of God to the accomplishment of His will. Righteousness is to live in faith that God will have His way. Not that we will have ours.” (From *Commit Yourself To Life*)

It is when a person comes to the end of themselves. Recognizes their failure and defeat, and surrenders themselves to the judgment and mercy of God, trusting in Christ and His death, that the trials and troubles can be seen as beneficial.

God doesn't abandon His people in their time of anxiety, fear, and hardship. Although one's efforts may seem in vain, God is still “a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). No tear you have ever shed has escaped the Father's eye. No lonely hour you have spent has gone unnoticed by the one who trod the winepress of God's wrath alone. Not a minute that you have labored in His field will go unrewarded.

It is only too easy to see that the world is in the ugly grip of sin, and many are obsessed with its corruption. Here is good news. You don't have to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders. Jesus is doing that, as he has been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

In His loving concern God has already “blessed us with every spiritual blessing” in Christ (Eph. 1). Through Jesus we have the forgiveness of sin, the blessing which no amount of money could purchase. Whatever the circumstances we still have fellowship with the Father and the Son, the privilege of prayer, peace of mind and the assurance of the ultimate victory of eternal life and glorious immortality.

So – the powers of darkness run rampant and the world chooses the ugly lifestyles of Satan – the apostle James wrote: “submit yourselves to God: resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Paul wrote: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom. 8:35, 37).

“Beloved, now are we children of God ... We know that if he shall be manifested we shall be like him: for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that has this hope set on him purifies himself even as he is pure” (John 3:2, 3).

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