



Title: Tested and Trained

Theme: Understanding God's Purpose in Afflictions

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Biblical look at God's purposes in allowing afflictions

The Apostle Paul writes to the young pastor Timothy and there is a pleasure found in this passage of Scripture for all pastors as well as for those who are good soldiers of Christ. Paul did not fear death and neither should good ministers of the Word of God, nor Christians, because they have a sure hope of being with Christ when they part from this world.

There are three points for us to consider as we take a Biblical look at God's purposes in allowing afflictions to come upon His chosen people. It is time of 1.) Testing so that Christians may be proved to be genuine believers in Christ. 2.) Training so His children will be able to achieve God's will for them. 3.) Revealing His deliverance in the minds of mankind and before their eyes.

I would propose to you that every one of us has the opportunity to speak in the same manner as the Apostle Paul who wrote, "...I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." (Acts 20:24)

Just what will enable us to have the testimony that the Apostle Paul had toward the end of the ministry that was entrusted to him?

Proved genuine

Every child of God gift given of the Holy Spirit has the opportunity to be effective in the "Great Commission." The heartbeat of every overseer of a church is that the children of God will be proven genuine in their Christian faith. Therefore, in this life there will be trials for the proof of a believer's faith in God, Christ and in his ability to surrender to the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit moved the Apostle Peter to write, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to

suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” (1 Peter 1:3-7)

Mankind places great worth on earthly things and considers the value of their lives by what they possess. God’s Word tells us that genuine faith in Him is much greater than the things that mankind values. The Lord knows what reveals genuine faith. His stamp of approval will be on faith that has been tested by the refining fires of trials in this life.

These various trials of life put the professing Christian’s religion to the test, thus revealing the nature of their real faith. “All kinds of” (*poikilos*) trials means temptations (The Complete Word Study Dictionary) of all kinds including disobedience, deceptions and lust. Christians will face various colors of trials (Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon; Dictionary of Bible Languages; New American Greek Dictionaries) including disease, demonic attack but not demonic possession. They will face strange unbiblical doctrines, persecutions, and oppositions in service to the Lord.

“Proved genuine” (*dokimiu*) means “to test for the purpose of approving.” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary; The Complete Word Study Dictionary) Here it means the results of a test proving that a child of God is genuine.

Just as it is desirable to know whether that which appears to be gold is genuine, it should be desirable for those in the church to be tested to see if their faith is genuine. To gold we apply intense heat so we may know whether it is what it appears to be. So it is with Christianity. Considering that our faith is far more important than gold, it is imperative that it be subjected to the right test. A Christian that wants to make a real mark for His Lord in this world wants the alloy (that which lowers or takes from perfection from someone) to be taken from his heart. The Christian’s heart cry is not just “Lord use me,” but first “Make me useable.” He is in agreement with the psalmist who wrote, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24)

There is much in the world that appears to be valuable like gold yet it has no value. There is much that appears to be Christian today, yet when tried through God’s testing, it has no real value.

Genuine faith is not only the sign of a trusting child of God, but a source of praise, glory, and honor to God the Father, Jesus the Son and the wonderful sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

One of God's greatest Apostles wrote, "...we ...rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us." (Romans 5:3-5)

In the Sunday School Times we read, "A skilled physician who was about to perform a delicate operation upon a man's ear said reassuringly, 'I may hurt you, but I will not injure you.' How often the great Physician speaks to us the same message if we would only listen! He promises a richer life and a more abundant spiritual health if we will only surrender to His purposes in taking us through trials. Why defeat that purpose?"

Let the Holy Spirit draw your attention to some of the great things that can happen in and through trials. Paul's sweetest epistles are from prison cells; John's Revelation was written in exile; Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* came from the Bedford jail and Luther's translation of the German Bible came as he was locked in Wartburg Castle. I am sure at times all these Christians felt like giving up, convincing themselves while in their most difficult trials God was finished with them and they had only the worst to face. Yet in their trials they found the strength of God and when the test was over, they were proved to have genuine faith in Christ their Lord. God is still bringing forth fruit from their labors today.

When man is faced with trials or temptations he draws closer to God. Christians are more aware for the need to pray to the Lord. Thus, God uses various methods in that cleansing process. God uses adversity from outside and even from within the church to expose what is in a man's heart. King David was attacked from outsiders, from men within his own ranks and family members. When these severe trails were over, King David was made into a better man of God by being purified and was proved genuine in his faith, unlike King Saul.

For application's sake today, "Do those who observe your life as you walk through the hot fires of trials see a genuine faith in God, Christ and enablement from the Holy Spirit?"

Discover God's will

Once the child of God has been proved to have genuine faith, afflictions can enable him to discover God's will. Moses was such a man and his afflictions enabled Him to be a man of deliverance with God. Hebrews 11:24-26 says, "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward."

Our text says "...when [Moses] had grown up..." meaning he had "become great." Moses enjoyed all the benefits of living under royalty. When Moses made his decision to be mistreated with God's people it was not because he was a failure needing a change.

Stephen tells us that Moses was forty years old (Acts 7:23) when he chose to identify himself with God's suffering people and get away from a life surrendered to the "pleasures of sin." The "pleasures of sin" in this passage of Scripture does not only refer to lust and other gross sins, but describes a way of life that is consumed with what the world calls success. This love for success breeds a hunger for position, prestige, power, wealth, and freedom from problems. True faith leads to a life of separation from that which intrigues the lost who are bound by this world's system. Therefore the child of God can live a life dedicated to the work of the Lord and to what God has called him to do, even if that means being mistreated by those who may despise God's people.

Christians who choose to forsake the pleasures of sin, that which rejects God's ordained purpose for them, will find their place in God's work. They will accomplish exactly what He has ordained for them and they will find themselves successful in fulfilling their part of the "Great Commission."

Moses occupied a unique place as God's friend. The Bible says, "The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend." (Exodus 33:11) Moses, as the fountainhead of the prophets of God was the first to receive, write down, and teach the revelation of the Lord. This revelation extended to all facets of life, including the laws of holiness, purity, rituals, family life, work and society.

He identified with the Jewish slaves who were treated very badly and were looked at with contempt. Slavery at the time Moses lived usually stripped an individual of legal and social status to the level of extreme poverty and was often a life style of forced labor. Moses preferred to suffer ill-usage with God's people rather than have a short-lived life of sin and living apart from the Lord.

Wuest's Word Studies tell us that Moses believed that God would fulfill His promises to His people. Therefore, he valued the Lord's work more than earthly treasures. Like Abraham, Moses rejected earthly comforts and security in order to serve the living and true God and he did not want to continue to sin by denying his place among God's people.

Moses is a hero of the faith and his entire ministry with God was molded into character by opposition and affliction. Christians who allow God to mold their character through opposition and affliction will overcome fear and temptation thus, living victorious Christian lives.

Moses' parents' lives are highlighted as overcoming fear and doing what is right by ignoring Pharaoh's edict of having every Hebrew boy born thrown into the Nile. (Exodus 1:22) They hid Moses for three months. (Exodus 2:2) After they could not hide him any longer Moses' mother made a water tight basket, she put Moses inside and placed it in the Nile River. Moses was delivered out of the river and then placed back into his mother's hands to be nursed until weaned under the financial support of Pharaoh's daughter. (Exodus 2:6-7) The affliction of Pharaoh's edict brought Moses' parents to that place of making a moral decision, to choose the world's view or God's way. Their choice in this affliction upon their lives enabled them to enjoy and be trained for God's service, that of raising Moses until weaned and teaching him all they could about the One True God.

When Moses had grown to manhood his rashness in taking matters into his own hands caused him to kill an Egyptian for beating a fellow Hebrew. Because he was a slave and no longer had the authority of a prince Moses fell under the affliction of Pharaoh's justice. (Exodus 2:15)

Pharaoh's desire to kill Moses to avenge the death of the Egyptian was most likely because of fear that Moses would be seen as the friend of the Hebrews and a possible champion to be followed. When it became public about his killing an Egyptian who very likely was a man of authority, (Exodus 2:14) Moses had to flee for his life. This caused Moses the afflictions of loneliness, humiliation and suffering that comes with having to leave family and the place where a man was raised.

In Moses' distress the Lord finds a place of safety in Midian. In Egypt God had provided what he needed to be well schooled in the ways of the Egyptians, a gentleman, a statesman, a soldier and a heart for the people of God which prepared him for the task God had for him. Yet, there was still something lacking. He needed to learn communion with God, that ability to get revelation from the Lord that comes from being long in that place of servanthood and alone with God. The Lord had brought Moses from prince, to slave, to shepherd so he could become God's vessel of deliverance and a prophet. All the afflictions that Moses suffered prepared his heart for devotion to God's will.

Those who are greatly used of God must be trained to deny themselves the pleasures and prestige that this world can offer so they can have fellowship with the Lord and be identified as being with God's people. They must be put in that place where they can be trained to hear the voice of God and have an ear and heart to respond to God's call. Often God uses afflictions to get Christians to the place in their spiritual hearts where they can be trained for real service unto Him.

For application's sake, "Are you trainable in the afflictions that come with being seen as a Christian for the sake of Christ? Are you allowing God to put you in those places where you can hear the voice of God and be made usable for His work?"

There is no greater position than being tested and trained for the work of the Lord. Athletes are tested for their abilities, disciplined lifestyle and heart for the game, so it is with the soldiers of Christ.

Show His deliverance

God allows affliction to prepare Christians for service unto Him and to show His deliverance in the minds of and before the eyes of mankind. Obedient Christians will praise God in the midst of their affliction and stay dedicated to Him regardless of the opposition.

Isaiah 48:10-11 says, "See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake... I will do this..." This passage of Scripture is found in among other Scripture that promises deliverance to the people of God upon their repentance. The key word the Holy Spirit wants you to grasp today is "refined" (*sarap*). When it is applied to people, this word refers to the purifying effects of external trials that God often uses to purify His people from sin. Cleansing from sin and deliverance from the Lord will be to glorify His mercy among an unworthy people. He will bring deliverance in a way that exalts Him in the minds of and before the eyes of mankind.

The second word worth grasping is "tested" (*bahar*) or as the King James Bible puts it, "chosen." As it is used here it means "I have proved thee in the furnace of affliction."

Consider the powerful example of the three Hebrew children, whom King Nebuchadnezzar threw into the fiery furnace. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were brought to the place of having to choose whom they were going to be faithful to. Like Moses, they were about to face affliction in order to be faithful to God Most High, or do public worship to the image set up by Nebuchadnezzar.

When confronted by the king they said, "...O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if He does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." (Daniel 3:16-18)

These three obedient men of God had seen the Lord defend His honor before. When King Nebuchadnezzar was confronting the Hebrews he made a statement that put the battle into God's hands with regard to defending His ability to bring deliverance. This king of Babylon made a huge mistake when he said, "...Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" (Daniel 3:15)

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego spoke words that reflect a relationship that had been established through the afflictions that had come into their lives for the sake of God. These same words will be found in mouths of Christians who are willing to suffer disgrace and affliction for the sake of Christ. Many Christians have experienced the Holy Spirit enabling them to say, "Our God is able, but even if does not save us, we want you to know, O world, we will not serve your gods." These Christians find themselves being listed in the long list of heroes of the faith.

For those who may not know the rest of the story, the three Hebrews were thrown into the fire and Nebuchadnezzar was left looking at a sheer miracle. The God greater than him and his gods was in the fiery furnace with those three men who chose to be identified with the One True God of heaven and earth. In the midst of their affliction, God was with his faithful, just as He is always with His children who worship Him in spirit and truth.

God's proof that He was able and faithful to deliver His obedient children brought forth an acknowledgement of truth for all to hear, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God." (Daniel 3:26) Their trust in the Lord and willingness to give their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God (Daniel 3:28) brought forth a proclamation that all need to heed today, "...Praise be to... God." (Daniel 3:28) God showing Himself faithful in the affliction of His servants birthed forth a decree saying, "no one is to say anything against the God Most High."

For application's sake, in your afflictions are you worshiping Jesus Christ, no matter what oppositions are coming at you? The world and devil can come with some pretty threatening ways of intimidating the children of God.

Christians who have surrendered to the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work in their afflictions make these statements with their lives. 1.) They belong to Christ and the afflictions they face prove that they are genuine believers who trust in Christ. 2.) In their afflictions God has done a work that makes them usable and reflects a surrendered life to the Lord's will, thus, enabling them to hear the voice of God and walk in step with His Holy Spirit. 3.) In their afflictions, God is able to bring to the mind of others that He is the Only True God that can bring deliverance to His obedient children.

Adoniram Judson was one man of God who was proved genuine in his faith in Christ through sufferings in Burma. He was able to hear the voice of God and enabled by the Holy Spirit of Christ to fulfill his calling. In the affliction that he received in prison, God made known to others that He is a God able to bring deliverance.

Adoniram so wanted to take the Gospel into India, yet was rejected entrance and was not permitted to preach to the Hindus. After many trying times, frustrations, fears and failures, the Judson's found an open door in Burma. Upon their arrival it was discovered that there was not one known Christian in Burma. The Judsons had no friends and at first there was only the voice of God to guide and direct them. After living with loneliness for some time a baby was born, but in eight months the couple suffered the affliction of losing their child to cholera.

The couple worked night and day under soul-crushing, heart-breaking condition for six years before they saw their first convert. Converts came slowly and when it looked like things were about to change for the good, missionary Judson was thrown into prison condemned to die, accused of being a British spy. After twenty-one months of intense prayer, Adoniram Judson was released. His work with the Lord progressed and the gospel power began to open blind eyes, breaking idolatry and changed lives began to emerge.

After thirty-four years of ministry, Adoniram Judson died at the age of sixty-two. When he was dying, news came to him that some Jews in Turkey had been converted through reading of the account of his afflictions in Burma. He told his wife, "This is good news. When I was a young man, I prayed for the Lord to send me to Jerusalem as a missionary. But he sent me to Burma to preach and to suffer the afflictions of imprisonment. Now, because of my suffering, God has brought some Jews in Turkey to repentance!"

Sometime after his death a government survey recorded 210,000 Christians in Burma. Adoniram Judson allowed the Lord to mature him in the afflictions he received for the sake of Christ. And in a place where there were no known converts, God proved Himself mighty for His name sake by calling over 200,000 souls to Christ.

Adoniram Judson is called a mighty man of faith, prayer, purpose, patience in afflictions and perseverance for the Son of God and for the souls of men.

When the church does as Moses did, looks ahead to her reward, she will allow God to mold her into Christ-likeness in her afflictions. Then great things with God will be enjoyed.

Let us pray!!!!