

Recognising the hand of God in adversity and affliction (Quality: Very good)

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Preacher: Mercer, Seth (1930-2017)

[0 : 00] So needing divine help, I must venture now this evening in directing your thoughts, may they be prayerful thoughts, to the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 30, and I must read verses 20 and 21.

The prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 30, and reading verses 20 and 21.

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more.

But thine eyes shall see thy teachers, and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

As a people, at this present time, we have quite a number among us who are afflicted in different ways.

[2 : 04] And in that sense, we are an afflicted people. We have those who are younger in years, who are afflicted.

We have those who are much older, and they are afflicted too, in different ways.

We have those in the midst of life, who have affliction. And it is really very much, with all this, upon my mind, my heart, my soul, that I am having to venture with these two verses this evening.

And as I may be held, there is very, very important truth contained in these two verses.

Well, how then does verse 20 begin? And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction.

[3 : 37] And that word, affliction, in the margin, is rendered oppression. But what I am burdened with, particularly this evening, is this.

Our great and ever-continuing need in our life, and in whatever way the Lord may send affliction to us, we so need to recognize, and to understand the meaning of these few opening words.

And though the Lord give you, what a difference it makes to any poor sinner, who is made aware of their great need, and their great need of God's help.

And so I venture then now to speak like this. The Lord knows how it is with everyone here this evening. And he knows how it is with us all.

He knows what is in our life, and in our path. But you know, left to ourselves, we can so quickly be filled with rebellion regarding affliction.

[5 : 23] and adversity. And left to ourselves, how quickly our own spirit can rise up.

Yes, against the Lord's dealings with us. And I am venturing to speak to everyone that is here in this way.

The Lord knows what is in your path. And I can tell you this. What a difference it will make to us when we recognize the hand of God to be upon us, in it, and with it.

And though the Lord give you. Friends, I ask everyone here this evening, the Lord knowing what is in your life, in your path.

You may not be walking. And the word affliction and the word adversity, of course, they have their own particular meaning.

[6 : 38] however it may be with any here, and of course those that are not here too. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, one of the meanings of the word adversity is this.

it will mean it is opposite to our desire. And you know, when the Lord comes to his people in their path, and of course, adversity can be in all kinds of ways.

And affliction can be in all kinds of ways. But thinking of that, one of the meanings of the word adversity, that it is opposite to our desire.

And the Lord knows if there are those here this evening. And it could be that there are those here and there are things in your life that you may not be able to speak about, perhaps.

But there are things in your life. And, oh, when, especially when, it is so opposite to how we would have it.

[8 : 05] Are you there this evening, any of you? Do you have things? You may have things you are not able even to talk about. But there are things in your life.

But, oh, what need we have to rightly understand this. And what a difference it makes when we can see it in that light.

And I think there is that beautiful hymn in our hymn book that begins like this. It is the Lord enthroned in light, whose claims are all divine, who has an undisputed right to govern me and mine.

Now, here I am having to come, then. Here I am having to begin. And though the Lord give you.

Are there any here tonight that really understand this? Has the Lord revealed this to you? That whatever it might be, you've been made aware that it is God-given.

[9 : 19] There is another word, and I know from time to time I am compelled to proclaim it, but there is another word in the book of Job.

And really it is the same truth, but it says this, doesn't it? He causeth it to come. He causeth it to come.

You know, left to ourselves, we begin to think and to speak like this, don't we? Why has this happened to me? Why has this happened to us?

Well, he causeth it to come. Whether for corruption, or for his land, or for mercy. And how often in the Lord's dealings with his people, it is all three woven together in his purposes of grace.

And are there any here tonight? Are there things in your life that are so opposite to how you would have it? It can be in many different ways, but you will understand this if the Lord has given you understanding.

[10 : 36] And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, the water of affliction. things that have come into your life.

they may have come so unexpectedly. And then you will join with one who said, Lord, why is this?

I trembling cry, wilt thou pursue thy worm to death? The Lord didn't leave it there in the life of John Newton, did he?

Lord, why is this? I trembling cry, wilt thou pursue thy worm to death? Tis in this way, the Lord replied. I answer prayer for grace and faith.

I think of that, I cannot help but think of our friend, Mrs. Funnel, you know. And I think of others. We have them among us. And there are those of you here tonight, that you know this is so.

[11 : 47] We were mentioning to our deacons in the vestry, and we agreed that we are an afflicted people. We have afflictions in different ways.

Well, the Lord helped me to try to convey this to you then. And though the Lord give you, oh, if any of you should go home even with that tonight, and you may, the Lord may already have told you so.

You may know this, but then we need the Lord to come again. We need to be, if I may use such wording, we need to be reminded.

It is the Lord, enthroned in light, whose claims are all divine, and has an undisputed right to govern me and mine.

And you know, sometimes there are afflictions that come, when we're left to ourselves, we could think, I would never have thought this would have happened. Who would have thought that such an affliction as this or that would have come upon whoever it might be?

[13 : 00] But there's a very blessed way in these two verses that I hope the Lord will help me to convey to you.

And though the Lord give you, give you, give you, friend, do you know that? Have you been brought to understand it? To believe that, yes, that there is a purpose in it, destroy it not, there is a blessing in it?

And what does that mean? Well, of course, it means this, that we can only know a real blessing through the path of adversity or affliction as the Lord sanctifies it to us.

For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless, and sanctify to thee, thy deepest distress. There could be those here tonight, you may have something in your life, and it's been going on and on.

And you may have trembled in the very thought, Lord, oh, what will be the end of all this? For me, for us? Well, may the Lord help me to bring you the answer to it from God's word this evening.

[14 : 16] And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, if you think of bread, we all know this, and what a wonderful provision bread is for us.

I would have to say from my own heart and mind, I've never yet grown tired of eating bread of you, naturally I mean. But how much greater when we are favoured with this, and though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, adversity, again, that the meaning of the word, one of them, opposite to our desire.

Oh, are there those here this evening, and you may be saying, I never ever thought that I should have to walk this path. But friend, the Lord has sent it.

The Lord has sent it. If you were to go home with that tonight, I can tell you this, it would bring some relief to your mind. If you go home with this and realise this, and feel it, and then you'll have to pray rather not to get out of it or that the Lord would remove it, but you'll pray, Lord, may it be sanctified to me, to us.

You see, again, he causeth it to come, whether for correction and how often we need it, or for his land, for his church, his joy, his treasure.

[15 : 43] You know, those whom the Lord brings into office in the church of God, in whatever way it might be. But you know, if the Lord places them there, they're there for a purpose.

And the Lord will bring things into their life, and the same applies to his servants too. Oh, it is what the Lord's servants are. The Lord leads them into what they have to walk in.

And when the Lord sanctifies it to them, friends, that is the way that they find their hearers. That is the way when they can speak with some authority, some feeling.

And you know, discerning hearers, they'll feel this. You'll know what it is when the Lord may send one or another of his servants to you, and they enter right into your path.

Oh, but don't forget that the Lord has first of all led them into it. Brought them into this path, into that path, into this experience, into that experience.

[16 : 45] And as the Lord sanctifies it, then he'll bring them. And that is how his church, his joy, and his treasure are fed. They feed them.

Oh, yes, they know what it is to feed upon Christ in his word. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, those that may be there tonight, this bread of adversity.

You're having to walk in a path you've never had to walk in before. And oh, you tremble as to what the end of it will be. You wonder and you say, oh Lord, what will be?

You'll join with Daniel in chapter 12 in the book of the prophecy of Daniel. When dear, I use this way of speaking, I can say it, when dear Daniel could say this, oh my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?

Are any of you there tonight? We know how the Lord indeed, to my understanding, it was as though the Lord never really gave him an answer to it all.

[18 : 00] But what he did tell him was this, you know, what did he tell him? He told him this, but go thou thy way till the end be, and thou shalt rest and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.

Oh my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? Well, if I might be allowed this thought, and I know I've said it before, that there was a time, however long ago now it was, but there was a time when I was in and I was under such a time of trial, and I needed to visit someone in the hospital, and as I walked down to the hospital here in Eastbourne, and this was just how I was feeling, and in my heart I was saying, oh my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?

And the Lord in mercy granted me this, and this is what he gave me, ending in eternal peace. That was the answer the Lord gave me, ending in eternal peace.

That was to be the end of it. And I venture to say that to poor sinners here this evening. Friend, that's going to be the end of it for you. That is going to be the end of it for you.

It's going to end in eternal peace. But the Lord has caused it to come. He has sent it. And it's not in anger. It is dear people.

[19 : 37] It can be said to them and for them, not in anger, but in his dear covenant love. Then if you could go on with that tonight, and feel this in your case, your path, your affliction, and if the Lord should say it to you, that it is not in anger, but it is in his dear covenant love.

It's to bring you at last home to glory. Oh, that is going to be the end. It will end in eternal peace. You know that, oh, that calmed my mind under that particular trial on that occasion.

And though the Lord give you, now I must try and come to this, and though the Lord give you, oh, I feel that is a very important word here tonight.

If any of you are favoured to really understand this, whatever it may be, the Lord has given it to you. He's given it to you. And he has a purpose of grace.

And really, you know, in the life, I say this from my heart, in the life of a child of God, the whole life of a child of God is one long weaning process.

[20 : 56] There are those of us here tonight, we've proved it, haven't we? Our life has been one long weaning process. To be being weaned from the world and all that it means, indeed at times weaned from everything and everyone.

And what is the Lord's purpose? Well, I can tell you that Jesus may be all in all. And that's the Lord's purpose.

I know I've said this before, but dear Mr. Frank Gosden, on one occasion, you know, we have the hymn, have we not? Thus far my God has led me on.

And the dear man was saying this when he was preaching on one occasion, and he put the first line and the last together, thus far my God has led me on, that Jesus may be all in all.

Oh, when we can do it in this line, when we can see it in this line, what a difference it will make to the path of affliction and adversity or whatever it might be.

[22 : 03] And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, we know very well regarding bread, we need to eat it, we know too regarding water that we need to drink it.

There's no way round it, you know. If bread is going to do us any good, we must eat it. If water is going to do us any good, we must drink it. And there are two vital things in our lives naturally.

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, now the Lord doesn't leave it there. There's something in this 20th verse that to me is very important teaching.

Here it is. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet, that little word yet, and there's so much in it, the meaning of it, yet, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner anymore.

but thine eyes shall see thy teachers. Now what does that really mean? Well it means that adversity and affliction when sanctified to us, I emphasize that, when sanctified to us, and when we are favored to view affliction and adversity and trouble and distress in this light, yet shall not thy teachers.

[23 : 49] You see, the very things that the Lord sends into the lives of his people, when they are really sanctified to us, we shall find them to be our teachers.

And it's in that path that we learn. It's in that path that the Lord will open his word to our understanding. It's in this path when we're made to feel our great need of this, and then we shall have to pray about it in that light.

Well, are there any here tonight, and the Lord knows what's in your path and your life, but friends, can you see it in this light? Have you been favored to see it in this light?

He causeth it to come. He doesn't come by chance. And again, I say it, it's not in anger. It's out of love.

Whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth. Whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

[24 : 59] And what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? Oh, and when we are really brought into the word that follows on in Hebrews, chapter 12.

Let me read it to you because it's all bound together with this subject this evening. If we know something of this, for whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth, if ye endure chastening.

Now, in our full and sinful nature, we don't want this, do we? Well, that's the last thing you'll want. For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

If ye endure chastening, the Lord God dealeth with you as with sons, as with daughters. For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

But I wanted to bring you to this. Now, if we can come, feelingly come, into verse 11 in Hebrews 12, it will be an answer, really, to this word that I'm venturing with.

[26 : 17] Yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eye shall see thy teachers.

These very things in the Lord's hand, they are for our teaching, our instruction. And what is the Lord's purpose? It is really this, that Jesus may be all in all.

Now, there is an answer to it, but this, now, no chastening, for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, here really is the subject matter.

Nevertheless, afterward, when it's sanctified, when we're brought as a poor sinner to the feet of Jesus with it, and in it, and under it, and when we can understand that the affliction, or whatever it is in your life, that the Lord has sent it, and what is his purpose for you, friend?

It's to bring you nearer to him. It's to wean you from this poor world, it's to deliver you from its power, so that you may be brought indeed to seek.

[27 : 39] Jesus only can do helpless sinners good. Well, this 11th verse in Hebrews 12, then, now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous.

Nevertheless, nevertheless, afterward. Oh, are there any of you here tonight and you're saying in your heart, Lord, may there be a nevertheless afterward for me.

Do you so, you know you need all this sanctified? You know that above if only the Lord will set it apart, if only the Lord will use it, if only he will bring out that which shall be to the glory of his holy name.

And then we shall be able to look back and say from our heart, it has been good for me that I have been afflicted. And the psalmist could say that I have learned thy precepts.

Now, I'm going back to this just for a further moment. Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous nevertheless afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

[29 : 05] Now, what a mercy when we can view our path, our sufferings, our affliction, the adversity, yes, and even the prosperity. When the Lord grants this, it all needs sanctifying.

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet, shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner anymore, but thine eye shall see thy teachers.

I think, I think, particularly in this moment of God's dear servants, and I would never forget their dear ones either.

You know, pastors, pastors' wives, and ministers' wives, and deacons' wives, if they are one with their husband, they know what it is to walk together in it.

And in the path, but you know, regarding the solemn work of the ministry, we can only find our hearers if we are led into, brought into, and enabled to really find our hearers, to come where they are.

[30 : 19] And you'll know when God's servants come where you are. You'll know the difference, friend. You'll feel, oh, it'll make you feel, and there'll be times, you know, when the Lord will meet with you, he'll speak to you, and then you'll know what it is to go home strengthened with might in your inner man, the Lord enabling you to take up your cross daily.

What does the Lord say? I don't know if I can find this, but the word has just come into my very thoughts, and I would be glad if I could just find this.

But what does the Lord say? He tells us, if any man, and he said it to them all, oh, I hope there will be those here tonight to whom the Lord is speaking, and he said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

Then your man will come after me. Oh, if we're going to be of any use in the church of Christ on earth, it will have to be this way. Now, that isn't the end of it.

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, do you have something in your life, and you wonder if it will ever end?

[31 : 59] Is this dear Lord thy way? Then who can hope to gain the prize such numbers never seek, such numbers seek in vain?

Is this dear Lord the way? You have things in your life, you have a cross, you have a thorn in the flesh, you have a calf, and there you are, and left to yourselves, you'll kick and you'll rebel, and you'll say, why is this, I trembling cry, will thou pursue thy womb to death?

But friend, the Lord has a purpose in it, and to any hold office in the church of Christ, it's bound to be that way. You know, when you think of those who come to the desk, and they give out the hymns, and if they're burdened about it, you know, they pray about it, they're burdened about it, and often the Lord will use, will sanctify the very things that are in their life, and he'll bring them to him.

And how good when it is, sir, how good when the hymns find us there, they're a part of our worship, and how good when they do, and how good when the word of God comes just where we are, and we think sometimes you may have thought, as I have, you may have known a few times when you thought, someone must have told the preacher all about me.

Have you ever felt like that? When you felt someone must have told him? I remember an occasion in my own life when I thought someone must have told the man, but of course no one had, but the Lord had brought the dear man into where I was.

[33 : 51] And I'll tell you what the word of God was on that occasion, and it was this, for we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh, and the dear man came right into my path, and at the end of that Sunday morning service, the Lord favoured me with such a sense of submission to his holy will.

And when the Lord grants a poor sinner a little of that, well that's real blessing friend, when we are favoured with real submission to the will of God, and when we are unable to say from our heart the will of the Lord be done, we are given grace to take up our cross, and to follow him, that is really what it's all about.

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed.

Can any of you hear tonight, can you see now that all this is in the Lord's hand, it's for your teaching, and you wouldn't have been able to have learned what the Lord will have you learn in any other way, but in this path that you're in.

There's a purpose in it, destroy it not, there's a blessing in it, and you know that's what the Lord uses. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more but thine eyes shall see thy teachers.

[35 : 39] Well, I'm sure there are those here with myself this evening, and if the Lord has given you understanding, whatever it is in your path, it's there for a purpose.

Now, what else does it say? And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way.

Walk ye in it when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left. Well, here then is the word of God.

I hope it's the word of God for some poor sinner here tonight, and I include myself in it. Friends, don't forget this, that the Lord's servants, their souls need feeding.

And it's a wondrous favour when any of God's servants, as they seek to preach the word of God, they feed on it themselves. And they're preaching it with feeling.

[36 : 45] They're preaching it with understanding. They know what they're speaking about. They can join in their measure with the Lord Jesus when he said, we speak that that we do now, and testify of that that we have seen.

And of course it goes on, that those that he was preaching to, and he had to say, and you receive not our witness, but oh what a mercy when it's the other way round.

And when our souls are fed, when we do feed on Christ, in his word, when Christ is made precious to us.

Jesus. And so, here it is then, verse 21, and though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner anymore, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers, and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee.

Not in front of you, but behind you. In other words, motivating you are, giving you grace again. If any man will come after me, let him first deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

[38 : 03] And it's a daily matter, you know. A daily matter. Any of us here tonight, and the Lord may have given us a cross in one way or another, and there you are, you wake up with it in the morning, you go to bed with it, you wake up again in the morning with it, and you have this cross, and yet what is it?

Well, I can tell you, you are a follower of Jesus. A follower of Jesus. You're walking in the footsteps of the flock.

You're in the narrow way that leads to life eternal. So, and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee. Oh, if any of you should have this to go home with tonight, I hope you will.

You'll go home and you'll feel, Lord, I know, I know, I know that this is the path that's appointed for me. And if the Lord favours you to go home tonight, and once more he makes you willing, he makes you willing to follow him, if any man will come after me, let him first deny himself.

You know, that's something that in our fallen nature, you'll never want to do. But let him first deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.

[39 : 35] The Lord has a purpose in him. And thine ear shall hear a word, the word of God, a word behind thee, saying, this is the way.

It's the way to heaven. It's the narrow way that leads to life eternal. So, friend, this is the way for you. Walk ye in it.

And if the Lord gives you grace tonight, and you go home with this, and then you'll say, Lord, give me grace, enable me that, Lord, enable me. Enable me to walk in this path.

And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, this is the way. Walk ye in it. When ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

In other words, when ye turn to the right hand, or turn to the left, but it's go on. It's go on. Let me just remind you of what we sometimes sing in that beautiful hymn, 812, as I close these few remarks this evening.

[40 : 50] Confirmed by one soft secret word, I seek no further light, but walk depending on my Lord by faith and not by sight.

Of friends and counsellors bereft, I often hear him say, decline not to the right or left, go on, though here's the way. Go on, though here's the way.

I hope that'll be a word for someone tonight. Friends, the Lord is saying to you, go on, though here's the way. And it's the way to glory. Weaken myself, in him I'm strong.

His spirit's voice I hear, the way I walk, cannot be wrong, if Jesus be but there. And friend, do you know what that is? In the midst of it all, do you find that he's with you in the way?

Well, I must leave it with you. And thine ear shall hear a word, the word of the Lord. And thine ear shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way.

[41 : 59] Walk he in it when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left. I just tell you something that happened to me in this house of God many years ago, in my very early days here.

And dear Mr. Rolfo was then alive, he was here as a hearer, and I was in the vestry, and I heard him coming, because he was an old man with a stick, and I heard him coming, and I thought, oh Lord, whatever is he going to say to me tonight?

And he stood in front of me that evening, at the end of the evening service, he stood in front of me in the vestry, and this is what he said to me, he said, you know, you won't keep going round and round the denomination like you are.

Then he said this, let thine eyes look right on, and thine eyes look straight before thee, ponder the path of thy feet, let all thy ways be established, and he turned round and went.

But it was God's word, I hope we shall feel it, God's word tonight, Amen.