

SERMON STARTERS

BLESSED BUT STRESSED

*"We must through many **tribulations** enter the kingdom of God."* (Acts 14:22)

There are no cross-less Christians! Every genuine child of the Heavenly Father walks a trail through trials on the way from their earthly father's house to their Heavenly Father's House. As we walk that narrow way, we are indeed blessed but we are also stressed from time to time. Jesus said, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* (Matt. 16:24)

I am tempted from time to time to say to some of my fellow travelers on the highway to heaven who are chronic complainers: "What did you expect when you began to follow Jesus? What is it about a cross that you do not understand? By the cross we are blessed, yes, and by the cross we are stressed! Did not Jesus fall under the weight of His cross? Cross bearing is not easy or painless. Did you anticipate affluence and not affliction? A life of leisure and pleasure; a life of good health and great wealth? To be blessed and not stressed?" I have wanted to say that but haven't – until now!

While to be blessed and not stressed may be the experience of a very few, they are the rare exception. Jesus does not promise *"Skies always blue, flower-strewn pathways all your life through; sun without rain, joy without sorrow, peace without pain."* What did He promise? He said, *"In the world you will have **tribulation**; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33) What is this "**tribulation**" that Jesus predicted and Paul later preached about when he said, *"We must through many **tribulations** enter the kingdom of God."*? (Acts 14:22)

What is "tribulation"?

The word "*tribulation*" comes from the Latin word, "*tribulum*." This word was used for the ancient Roman method of threshing grain. A cart having rollers with pieces of iron inserted was pulled over the grain thereby crushing it and separating the chaff from the grain. This cart apparatus was called a "*tribulum*" and from that word we get our word "*tribulation*."

"*Tribulation*" is a condition of affliction and distress; trials; any adversity; an experience that tests one's endurance, patience, or faith; suffering.

What Jesus and Paul Are Not Saying:

- They are not saying that if we do not experience *tribulation* we cannot enter the Kingdom of God;
- They are not saying that because we experience *tribulation* we earn the right to enter the Kingdom of God.

What Jesus And Paul Are Saying:

- Since we are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ we are not exempt from *tribulations* which are the common experience of mankind;
- that *tribulations* are normal in an abnormal world;

- that God does not shield us from the effects of having a fallen nature and living in a sinful environment;
- that we will experience temptations, troubles, trials and *tribulations* as we journey on our pathway through earthly kingdoms on our way to His heavenly Kingdom;
- therefore, expect *tribulations* and count on encountering them, however, having been warned, persevere through them knowing that *“all that will live godly in Christ Jesus should suffer persecution.”* (II Tim. 3:12)

The Purpose of Tribulations.

II Corinthians 4:17 - *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...”*

The purpose of divine testing is to sanctify and strengthen. The purpose of satanic tempting is to deceive and destroy. “Adversities do not make a man frail. They show what sort of man he is.” - Thomas a Kempis

When we experience *tribulation* in any of its various forms, we often think of ourselves as being torn to pieces under the cruel pressures of adverse circumstances. No thresher ever yoked up his *“tribulum”* for the purpose of tearing up his sheaves but to salvage the precious grain. Trials are sent by God to remove the chaff in our lives and to make us fit for fruitful service. So our loving Savior never puts us under the press and stress of adversity needlessly. Therefore, take heart, for the *tribulations* that ground down the sinner serve to build up the saint! “Trials come to prove and improve us.” - Augustine

The Profit From Tribulations.

Psalms 119:67 – *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.”*

Psalms 119:71 – *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.”*

Romans 5:3, 4 – *“We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.”*

The Partners in Tribulations.

C.H. Spurgeon said, “Good men must never expect to escape trouble; if they do they will be disappointed, for none of their predecessors have been without it.”

Listen to our partner Paul: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.” (II Cor. 4:8-11)

Our partner John said, “I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ....” (Rev. 1:9)

Partner Jesus also hurt: "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." (Hebrews 5:8) When we are experiencing *tribulations*, we are in good company!

The Promise in Tribulations.

The Lord Jesus promised *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."* (John 14:18)

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, **who comforts us in all our tribulation**, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."* (II Cor. 1:3,4)

"If we are thrust into the fiery furnace we shall find the Son of God walking at our side. Jesus is the Leader of a long procession of martyrs and sufferers. He leads through no darker rooms than He went through before; He knows exactly how much we can bear, and will not test us beyond our strength. He is with us and will help us to learn obedience, faith, and hope, as we follow in His footsteps." - Frederick Brotherton Meyer.

*"God has promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way;
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love."*

It is the way of the cross that leads to the wearing of the crown. I thank God that I am one of the blessed stressed! Like Gideon and his three-hundred, I am *"faint, yet pursuing."* (Judges 8:4)

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