

TRIALS

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Well, dear friends, I do not need tell you that I am glad to be here. In casting about in my mind for a subject, I wondered whether to study together with you the subject of faith or some other subject, present truth for instance, and so I decided to use again this one subject of trials. T-R-I-A-L-S, trials.

I was quite surprised in preparing this study to find how much there is in the Bible on the subject. It begins in the book of Genesis and continues into the book of Revelation. Some of the lessons on trials are directly and plainly stated; others we read between the lines and many others are inferred.

Well, then what is a trial? First we turn to the dictionary and then we'll examine the Bible.

We find in the dictionary four different definitions of the word 'trial'. The first one is (a) the act or process of trying, testing or putting to the proof (b) a testing of qualifications, attainments or progress or probation (c) experimental treatment of an operation, an experiment. Then next, (d) a being tried by suffering, temptation and so forth, hence a hardship, pain and so forth, that tries one's endurance. And source of a mind's irritation.

Coming to the Bible we find, in the O.T., five different Hebrew words that tell the meaning of trial.

When God called Abraham, to offer his son Isaac, the King James version tells us that God did tempt Abraham. That word 'tempt' there is misleading. Better translations say God did prove Abraham. God did put Abraham to the test. So that is in harmony with the subject that we are studying this hour.

Now then, I shall not endeavor to pronounce these five Hebrew words but merely to give their meaning and tell how they are rendered in the King James version.

First one of these words means to test or investigate and it is translated in the King James version examine, prove, test, try, and tempt. The second Hebrew word in the O.T. means to test or to attempt and it is rendered adventure, assay, prove, tempt, and try. The third Hebrew word means to fuse metal or refine and it is rendered cast, refine, refining, finder, goldsmith, melt, purge, perjury and try. Then the fourth word in the O.T. means to penetrate, to examine intimately and is rendered find out, make search, search out, and seek out, solve and try. Then the fifth word in the O.T. means a testing or will, judicial or of God, for clearness rendered temptation and trial.

I do not ask you to remember all these because I do not remember them all myself as they are given in Strong's Concordance. But these words convey to us the thought that trials have an important place in the Bible and in our experience. Coming to the N.T. we find four different Greek words that are rendered tempt and try. These words are first, to test or to approve rendered allow, discern, examine, approve, and try. The second word in the N.T. means to test, to endeavor to scrutinize, to entice and to discipline, rendered assay, examine, go about, prove, tempt, tempter and try. The third word in the N.T. means a putting to proof by experiment of good or experiment with evil, solicitation, discipline or provocation or by imputation, adversity, and it is rendered in the King James version simply temptation and try. Then the last or fourth word in the N.T. means to test thoroughly and it is rendered tempt. Now if we get the general meaning that is given in the Bible that is all we ask.

When we come up with all the various renderings put together, the Bible renderings in the Standard Version or the King James Version, are try, tried, trust, trials, trying, tempt, tempted, tempting, temptation, temptations, prove, proved, proveth, proving, approve and reprove. Now no one can say that there is little in the Bible about the word trials.

With these thoughts before us, do we choose our own trials? The answer is no. God chooses our trials for us. If He left us to choose our own trials, we probably would have no trials at all. So, therefore, how good a thing it is that our Heavenly Father is overruling in our lives and giving us the necessary or permitting the necessary experiences. They are permitted of God.

Now where do they attack us? They come to us from the flesh, from the world, and from the adversary.

Now if they come from the adversary, they must attack us through our flesh and that means they must attack us through the mind. And the mind is in the brain and the brain is a part of our physical organism.

If they come through the world, again they must attack us through the flesh because we are in an environment and we are creatures more or less subject to our environment. If that were not so, how could we become overcomers? If we had nothing to overcome, how could we be overcomers? If we have no trials, how could we be developed in our characters?

Let us turn to the O.T. for only a few examples of the trials of those who are brought to our attention in the O.T. First of all, when our first parents, Adam and Eve, were placed in the garden of Eden they were put on trial and they failed in that trial. They were thrust out of the garden in order that the death sentence might be executed. It does not require much imagination upon our part to see that it must have been a great trial to them to be

thrust out into the unfinished earth to wrestle with the thorns and the thistles and the heat and the cold etc. and all the necessary experiences which they then must pass through.

We take the case of Cain and Abel. What a trial it must have been to them. We see that Cain failed in that trial because he allowed jealousy to come into his mind, into his heart. If he had become exercised right by that trial he would have inquired or tried to find out why it was that Abel's sacrifice was accepted and his was not. He didn't do that and therefore he failed to get the lesson out of that trial.

We come on down through the O.T. in the experiences of Abraham or Joseph or Moses or all the various characters of the O.T., the prophets. They all had to endure the trials that God permitted. I like to think of the many trials that Moses had in connection with the children of Israel. He failed under one of them. God had told him to speak to the rock in order that water might flow out for the nation of Israel. He made the mistake of striking the rock instead because the first time he had this experience he had been told to smite the rock. So it must have been quite a trial to Moses to be debarred from the privilege to enter the promised land because he failed under this experience. Nevertheless, we know that that time is coming that he and the other Ancient Worthies whose trials are partially enumerated in the 11th chapter of Hebrews are going to have their place in the kingdom of God and it will be a very honorable place. As we review their experiences, one element He was developing was faith. So they became by their experiences and trials the heroes of faith. That glorious picture gallery that is given to us in the 11th chapter of Hebrews.

I like to think especially of the experiences of Joseph. Do you know how many years it was from the time his brethren sold him to the Ishmaelites until he was brought out of the dungeon to stand before Pharaoh? Well it was 13 years. Do you know how many more years it was from then until he was made known to his brethren—those brethren who came to buy grain? It was 9 years more so that it was a period of 22 years from the time that Joseph was sold by his brethren until he made himself known to them.

This story never grows old. How many chapters of Genesis does it occupy? Well it occupies all the chapters of Genesis from chapter 37 to the end of the book except one chapter.

Now when Joseph sent his brethren back to get Jacob, their father, he said to them, "Be not grieved or angry with yourselves for God did send me before you to preserve life, to preserve a posterity in the earth and to save lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you but God who sent me hither. Fear not for am I in the place of God? As for you, ye sought evil against me but God meant it unto good to bring to pass as it is this day to save much people alive. Now, therefore fear ye not and he comforted them and spake kindly unto them." Furthermore when he sent them away he said, "See that ye fall not

out by the way.” What a wonderful character he was. Largely as a result of 22 years of trials.

Now then we have briefly glanced at the O.T. You can go into the O.T. for yourselves and see how rich it is in lessons along the line of trials.

Well, we realize if we do that, that those people of that time were men and women of like passions with us. And yet God dealt with them and left lessons for us by their experiences. Furthermore, they were woven into the plan of God so that through them he gave us the types and the shadows of the law and many, many other lessons.

Now we come to the N.T. time and we find that our Lord Jesus is the chief example of one who was tried in N.T. times. We find that our Lord endured misunderstanding, lack of love, lack of cooperation, from that nation to which he came, in which he was born. We find that even his closest followers could not understand, could not enter into his experiences. As it was brought out this morning how they could not keep awake in the Garden of Gethsemane when he craved that fellowship and that help which they could not give. Later on, or at the same time, in the Garden of Gethsemane when his physical force had been depleted by the three and one half years of sacrificing, then came the severest trials of all. So he prayed to the Father as he contemplated what he was about to go through, he said, “Dear Father, if it be possible remove this cup from me, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.” There has been some question as to what that cup was. Was it the ignominy and suffering he was facing? I believe not. Why? Because the suffering and ignominy had all been foretold in the prophets. Would our Lord ask to have anything to be removed that had been foretold by the prophets? I think not. What then was the cup about which he prayed? To my understanding, it was the fear that he had not been 100% faithful in carrying out his earthly ministry. What would have happened if he had not been 100% faithful? He would not have had a resurrection. We would not have been redeemed. We would have no hope. And the mission for which he came to lay down the ransom price, would have been a failure.

Well, in Hebrews 5, verse 7 we read, “Who in the days of his flesh when he had offered up strong cryings and tears to him who was able to save him out of death, he was heard in what he feared.” The Heavenly Father gave him the assurance that up to that point everything was all right. From that moment he was the calmest one in all of that terrible drama. So when upon the cross, the Father gave him that experience that Bro. Barton spoke of this morning, the experience of utter alienation from the face of God even for a few moments, the alienation of the sinner race, he cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Once upon a time, I was talking with a socialist. The socialist had no faith in the Bible. He said that Christ was a wonderful man but when he came to that place where he said,

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” he showed his weakness. I say no he did not show his weakness because there he learned something to make him more precious to us than ever before. So we see our dear Redeemer’s relationship and his faith in his Father did not fail. So absolute was his faith that a little later he could say, “It is finished, into thy hand I commend my spirit.” So then, our Lord tells us in John 16, verse 33, “In the world ye shall have tribulation [ye shall have trials] but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world.” In other words, our Lord’s victory was complete and here he tells us he will share that victory with us. So how thankful we can be our Lord passed his trials successfully because not only our life, our eternal destiny is dependent on that but also the life of all mankind in due time.

Now briefly let us glance at the Gospel Age. All down through the Gospel Age the church class has been on trial. The messages to the seven churches in the second and third chapters of Revelation, show us that there were some of God’s dear saints even in the Dark Ages. The central theme, the central warning of those messages to the seven churches was beware of the man of sin, the mystery of iniquity, the papacy. We have every reason to believe that these warnings did not fall on deaf ears. But that these dear saints were faithful even in the dark part of the Gospel Age. And so we have the confidence that they made their calling and election sure and that they have obtained to that place that God marked out—character likeness to the Lord Jesus and largely by means of their trials.

We in this day and age cannot visualize the cruelty of the Dark Ages. Some of the brethren seem to be discouraged because they are not having the opposition that those brethren of the Dark Ages had. We should not be discouraged. Our trials are of a different kind. We’re living under different conditions and we have different things to overcome.

Here is a little gem taken from that calendar that Bro. Sundbom sends out to the brethren every year. Here Bro. Russell says on the text, “The flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh and these are contrary the one to the other so that ye can not do the things that ye would.” Gal. 5:17 Here’s the comment: “To his surprise, the Christian finds himself a slave to his own weaknesses and that he must battle daily, hourly almost, for victory.” How true that is. And if we had no trials, we would have no battle and we could not have victory.

Now coming down to the present time, we have been reminded today already that one of our trials is experiences that would move us away from the truth. Think how much we have received in the Harvest time of the Gospel Age. The six volumes of Studies in the Scriptures contain 83 chapters. Each chapter is a Bible topic in which that subject is ventilated. The Bible is correlated and harmonized for us. So then we have in those 83 topics a rich field for study, investigation and strength. But now someone would say,

“Brother, have not the time features of the volumes failed especially the time features of the second and third volumes?” Well, that remains to be seen. Suppose that the chronology was wrong. If the chronology was wrong then the 70 weeks of Daniel as we understand them, also would be wrong; the 1260 days, 1290 days and 1335 days of Daniel, our understanding of them would also be incorrect. Suppose the chronology were incorrect, then the Jubilee Cycles also would be wrong and several other things. But someone will say, “What about the parallels? What are you going to do with the parallels?” Why, I’m just going to let them be because I don’t know what to put in place of them. If you make a list of all the wonderful truths that we have received, you will find that the lists of those few things which we do not yet fully understand is a very small list. The list of those things which we have, which we rejoice in is a very long list. Now then, dear brethren, shall we not appreciate what we have received? Surely we shall. And so then, we see that as far as the truth is concerned, we are on trial. Dear friends let us be faithful to these things.

Now in our individual experiences we are having our daily trials. Our Heavenly Father is watching us to see our response to those experiences. Many of the experiences of the world of mankind we are sharing. For instance, the execution of the death sentence. The sickness, the frailties, a lot of these things the world of mankind have. We also have a share in them. What is happening as a result? If we receive these properly, we become more sympathetic. We are being qualified for that time when we shall be able to assist poor mankind. If God were not preparing a hope beyond the grave for the church and for the world, the history and experience of mankind would indeed be the last tragedy. So dear friends, how thankful we are that God is really preparing this glorious hope. And as a result of these trials rightly exercised, the hope of the high calling becomes more real and dear to us. Let us not lose that hope. Let us continue steadfast in that hope.

Now throughout all this our love for the brethren is being tried. Our love for the brethren. How can we pass that test? In the Manna comment for March the 16th we read, “We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. One of the final and most searching tests of these brethren and the one under which probably the most of those once awakened and armed will fail will be love for the brethren. Seemingly many will fail at this point and be therefore accounted unworthy of an abundant entrance into the Kingdom on this score.” Those are solemn words indeed. But what kind of love is this we are to have for the brethren? It is love that is based upon principle.

In the N.T. we have two different words that are translated love in the English. One is agape and the other is phileo. This agape love is a love that is based upon principle. And about the best way we can show our love for the brethren is to be faithful to the principle of the truth.

I find, dear brethren, that if there is a difference between myself and someone else on some point of truth, I need to make it a point of special prayer that my love shall be for everyone of these brethren.

We turn now in conclusion to the 12th chapter of Hebrews beginning with verse 1 down to 13: “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. 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. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.” (Hebrews 12:1-13 KJV)

So dear brethren, whether these trials come to us through the doctrines of the truth; whether they are the doctrines of the time features, whether they be the doctrine of Justification or whether any other doctrine, let us not try to escape the trials. You know, dear friends, if we were to refrain from mentioning the doctrine of justification because there is a difference of opinion among the brethren, would our unity be any different from that which exists in the denominations? Their unity is a result of ignoring their differences. It should not be so with us. At the same time, let us not make a hobby out of anything while we hold to the truth.

And now may the Lord bless us as we endeavor to be exercised by the trials that he sees that we need. Amen.