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Joseph: God was with Him, pt. 1

Alan Davidson

**"The arms of his hands were made strong by
the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob"
(Genesis 49:24)**

JOSEPH IS A BEAUTIFUL TYPE OF THE LORD JESUS IN SUFFERING.

Joseph said: "Think on (remember) me when it shall be well with thee" (Genesis 40:14). The Lord Jesus Christ said: "This do in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:24).

Joseph was the Son of his father's love (Genesis 37:3). The coat of many colours, the tunic with sleeves, was the privilege of the heir, born of the beloved Rachel. "He sent a man before them" (Psalm 105:17). "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1 John 4:14).

Joseph was rejected by his brethren, reminding us of the rejection of the Son of God. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11). "This is the heir; come, let us kill Him" (Matthew 21:38). His brethren hated him. "They hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him" (Genesis 37:4). "They that hate Me without a cause are more than the hairs of Mine head" (Psalm 69:4). "I am become a stranger unto My brethren, and an alien unto My mother's children" (Psalm 69:8).

Joseph reported their evil. The Lord said of the world: "Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7). His father "Sent him out of the vale of Hebron" (Genesis 37:14). "The Vale" mean fellowship, communion. Christ left heaven, the repose of the Eternal Son. "Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Person" (Heb. 1:3). Joseph went to Shechem, (Genesis 37:13), which means "shoulder", the strength of service. The Good Shepherd found the sheep and "Layeth it on His shoulders" (Luke 15:5). "The government shall be upon His shoulder" (Isaiah 9:6). Joseph, "found them at Dotham" (Genesis 37:17), which means "the law or custom". The Lord came to a people in bondage. "To preach deliverance to the captives" (Luke 4:18).

"They stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours" (Genesis 37:23). Hence they repudiated his sonship. As with the Lord, they cried, "Away with this Man" (Luke 23:18). "They part My garments among them" (Psalm 22:18). He was cast into a pit by Jewish hands. He was abandoned in a pit to hold water and the narrow entrance was blocked by a stone. Compare the words, "Thou hast laid Me in the lowest pit: in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon Me, and Thou hast afflicted Me with all Thy waves" (Psalm 88:6).

They sold Joseph "For twenty pieces of silver" (Genesis 37:28). Judas, "Brought again the thirty pieces of silver", "He cast down the pieces of silver in the temple", "The price of Him that was valued" (Matthew 27:3,5,9). He was delivered into Gentile hands. (Genesis 37:36). The leaders of Israel said: "We have no king but Cæsar" (John 19:15).

They "put him into the prison" (Genesis 39:20). The Lord was: "Numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). There was two prisoners in "The place where Joseph was bound" (Genesis 40:3). "When they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left" (Luke 23:33). Pharaoh dreamed and the prisoners dreamed: "They dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night" (Genesis 40:5; 41:1). Pilate's wife said: "I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him" (Matthew 27:19). Pharaoh the king "was troubled" and hoped for an interpretation (Genesis 41:8). Herod the king: "Hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him" (Luke 23:8). One of the prisoners, like the malefactor was forgiven (Genesis 40:21). "To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The other was hung upon a tree (Genesis 40:19).

There are four periods in Joseph's life that we should consider:

1. SONSHIP
2. STEWARDSHIP
3. SUFFERING
4. SOVEREIGN

1. SONSHIP

John's Gospel stresses the PREEMINENCE of the SON. In John 4, to the woman at the well, He is revealed as the Seventh Man. This incident occurred "Near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph" (John 4:5). In Genesis 45:13 Joseph said, "Ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt". In John 17:24, The Lord Jesus said, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory"

2. STEWARDSHIP

Mark's Gospel tells us about the PURITY of the SERVANT. Joseph as a teenager was tested at home. His grandfather was blind and died about the time that Joseph was sold into Egypt. His father was a cripple. His mother was dead. His brethren "hated" (3 times) him. The more he loved and served them the more they hated him. They treated him with malice, envy, cruelty, robbery, lies, and plotted his murder. "Who was sold for a servant" (Psalm 105:17).

In his twenties he was tested as to his purity. Sold for the second time, he was in the house of Potiphar, "He served him" (Genesis 39:4). All of Joseph's masters trusted him. There is no record of complaint, no anger, no revenge. The temptation by the wicked seducer was prolonged; she "cast her eyes upon Joseph", "day by day" (Genesis 39:7,10). The Perfect Servant "Was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan" (Mark 1:13). He could say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me". The key verse in Mark's Gospel is chapter 10:45: "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister (serve), and to give His life a ransom for many".

3. SUFFERING

Luke's Gospel is the Gospel of the SON OF MAN, THE MAN OF SORROWS. We read of Joseph in prison, in fetters, "whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron" (Psalm 105:18). "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him" (Genesis 49:23). "We saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear" (Genesis 42:21).

Joseph is associated with four houses. He was faithful in every house he entered. Luke records fourteen houses that the Lord entered. The Lord never encountered a need that He did not meet. The Gospels tell of the roads He walked, the villages He visited, the houses He entered, the tables where He sat. An early journey was into Egypt. "Called My Son out of Egypt" (Hosea 11:1). When Joseph came seeking the welfare of his brethren, they sat down to eat the food that he brought while he starved in a pit. They denied his birthright and they rejoiced at his bondage as they sold him as a slave into Egypt. The pit, Potiphar's house, was followed by the prison where he was forgotten. Perhaps it was there that the iron entered into his soul. "He was despised and rejected of men" like the Saviour, He was "a man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3).

4. SOVEREIGN

Matthew is the Gospel of the SOVEREIGN, "the Son of David" (Matthew 1:1). "Where is He that is born King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2). It is interesting that the wise men said, "We have seen His star in the east". The early words of Joseph declared; "Behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me" (Genesis 37:9).

Stephen says: "The patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt; but God was with him, and delivered him out of his afflictions, And gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house" (Acts 7:9-10). (Continued)

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The Excellency of Love

Carlos Fariñas

"And now abideth faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love."

1 Corinthians 13:13

Chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians contains the most beautiful and complete teaching on the spiritual gifts that God grants to His Church through the Holy Spirit. The chapter ends with the following sentence: "Covet

earnestly the best (better) gifts, and yet I show unto you a more excellent way". The Apostle's exhortation is to strive to use the most useful gifts, but he has a way that he considers better and useful for using those gifts, and that is what he explains in chapter 13, the way of love.

In our language, the word love has a wide range of connotations, since we can express various feelings with the same word, but in the language of the New Testament, Greek, several words are used to express affection for something or someone, and which in Spanish would be translated as love. Below I list some of them:

1.AGAPÉ: and its corresponding verb *agapao*, presents the most characteristic word of Christianity, and describes the attitude of God through His Son, towards all humanity and in a particular way, towards those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is that love that manifests itself with a willingness to die for those who are the object of that love. We could say that it is a sacrificial attitude. It is the word used in Ephesians 5:25 to command a man to love his wife, and it is equated with the love with which Christ loved the Church, and used in John 3:16 to express God's love for humanity.

2.PHILEO: differs from *agapao*, because it is used more to talk about natural affection, like the affection that any person feels for a family member. Never in the Scriptures is man commanded to love God using this verb, as is done in Romans 12:10.

3.PHILANTROPIA: denotes love for all humans.

4.PROSPHILES: denotes kindness, pleasure, agreeable (Philippians 4:8).

5.PHILOXENOS: describes love for strangers and is translated as hospitality in Titus 1:8/ Hebrews 13:2.

6.PHILARGUROS: is the love of money; misers (Luke 16:14/ 2 Timothy 3:2).

7.PHILAUTOS: describes self-love (2 Timothy 3:2).

8.PHILEDONOS: means lovers of pleasures (2 Timothy 3:4).

9. PHILADELPHIA: which is love of the brethren. (1 Thessalonians 4:9)

Now, in the passage from 1 Corinthians 13, we are going to find the characteristics of true love demanded by our God. It should be noted that a brother who does not have this ingredient of love for the exercise of any of the spiritual gifts is like an empty shell, like a cymbal that only makes noise, he is a complete nonentity.

The particulars of verse 4 describe the characteristics of this love. First it tells us that it is patient, that is to say, that true love is willing to suffer in order to exercise itself in favor of others. It is inevitable that the person who genuinely loves will suffer pain at the sight of the needs of others; they will suffer pain at the sight of their own limitations to help; they will generally suffer at the hands of others who do not understand that feeling, and that, on the contrary, it is benign. Then we are told that it is not envious, boastful or conceited. That is to say, that sincere love is humble at all times.

It behaves correctly, and exercises itself in doing good to others. In its suffering, love endures harsh and unjust treatment and forgives and forgets because it holds no grudge. It believes in others, always keeps hope for better days, endures all things.

From verse 8, the Apostle assures us that love is always the same love, it does not decay and will remain for all eternity. In that sentinel he teaches us that the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge had a specific time of manifestation according to God's purpose; that they would pass, as indeed they did, but love would continue to show itself, and although faith, hope and love, as gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit, the greatest of the three is love, for it is love that really makes the other two effective.

We remember that it was the Lord who commanded us to love one another as He did us. In John 21: 15, 17, the Lord asked Peter to act as a shepherd on the basis of love.

Galatians 5 teaches us that love is not an emotion, it is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but it must be exercised, as John says in 1 Jn. 3; it is not something that manifests itself spontaneously, but it must be given room to express itself.

So, knowing this expression of love well, we must take an interest in manifesting it widely.

Theocracy is the ideal government, and nations are great in proportion as they approach the ideal.

The Seven Words from the Cross, Psalm 22, pt 2

W. J. Hocking

We learn from the Gospels of seven utterances made by our Lord during His crucifixion. Three of them were spoken during the earlier hours, and four during the later period. The only one of the seven found in more than one Gospel is the cry of Christ's abandonment by His God, recorded by both Matthew

and Mark. It is evident from this double testimony of the Holy Spirit that this cry demands our reverent attention and prayerful meditation, especially.

First, the Lord, when they bound Him to the tree of cursing, prayed, "Father, (He did not say "My God "), forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Again, while the sun still shone brightly in the heavens, Jesus saw Mary His mother and the beloved disciple. He said to her, "Woman, behold thy son," and to him, "Behold thy mother" (John 19:26,27). His sympathies were not dulled by His sorrows and His sufferings. Further, we can hear His gracious and assured promise to the believing robber sharing the horrors of crucifixion at His side, "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Though poorer than the poorest of the poor, the Lord could still give. Cast out of His inheritance, stripped even of His garments, He seemed to possess nothing, yet He bestows upon this converted criminal the right of entrance to paradise itself. What joy there was in heaven over the one sinner who had repented!

But then the noonday sun was supernaturally eclipsed. There was darkness over the whole land from the sixth to the ninth hour. The Holy Sufferer was hidden from the eyes of men. He was closeted with God; and in the "night season" He was not silent. But out of the prevailing darkness came the cry, "My God; My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" John also records (19:28-30) two other utterances, "I thirst" and "It is finished," both spoken with the assuredness of omniscience. What had to be done had then been accomplished.

What then had been finished? What had been done? Who can describe it? Who can measure it? Was it not that stupendous work of propitiation which in respect of all His attributes satisfied God as to sin, enabling Him to be just and the justifier of the unjust who believe in Jesus? The Lord knew what He had accomplished. He knew what He had endured, and that in His suffering He was forsaken of God.

Moreover, the Son of God knew that the appointed offering for sin had been made and that the sacrifice was acceptable. He knew that the darkness had passed, and that He had emerged into the sunshine of God and the Father's delight and complacency. We have next the seventh utterance, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). And He passed into paradise, there to welcome the penitent robber who had believed on Him and for whose sins He had made propitiation to God.

Propitiation and Praise

In the third verse, Messiah provides the answer to His own inquiry, "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" The answer is, "Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." The holiness of Jehovah required the judgment of sin before either His people or the praises of His people could be acceptable to Him. Propitiation for sins

is the foundation of worship and praise, because the place where Jehovah dwells is holy.

Now the children of Israel were a people separated from all other nations of the earth to offer praises to Jehovah continually. The tabernacle was built in the wilderness and the temple on Mount Zion that He might dwell among them and receive their tribute to His name. Jehovah appointed that daily, morning and evening, the priests should burn "the most holy incense" to Him in the holy place. Incense is a figure of the sweet-smelling praise that God seeks from the lips of man.

Israel was elected in order that in their daily service of praise they might illustrate what Jehovah required from all men. He brought them out of the house of bondage, showing them His mercy when the destroying angel passed by their dwellings, and His redemption when their enemies were drowned in the Red Sea. Immediately, the song of praise ascended to Jehovah from His redeemed people. Moses and the children of Israel celebrated His victory, ascribing their deliverance to the strength of His right arm (Exodus 15).

Moreover, in this national praise-song, Israel looked forward to the mountain of Jehovah's inheritance, His dwelling-place, the sanctuary established by His own hands in the land of promise. Then "they believed His words; they sang His praise." But soon they forgot Jehovah's mighty works, disobeyed His commandments, and worshiped the idols of the heathen that knew not God. They forsook the Holy One of Israel, and neglected their daily offering of praises before His dwelling-place. Israel sinned grievously, and provoked the righteous wrath of their God, the One Who inhabits the praises of Israel.

To this great sin by that favored nation especially the Holy Sufferer seems to make allusion in verse 3. Because of their sins, not His own, He was forsaken, and His cries were unheard. Jesus was standing in the breach. He had given Himself a sacrifice for sins. He was making propitiation for sin. By His suffering, He would bring holiness where there was now unholiness, righteousness where there was unrighteousness and praise where there was now but "cursing and bitterness." By His atoning work, the Lord Jesus would satisfy every claim the Holy One inhabiting the praises of Israel made in respect of the sins of men; but in the meantime that Holy One was irresponsive to His cry. The close connection between propitiation and praise is plainly marked in the construction of the Psalm. The former part, to the middle of verse 21, depicts Christ upon the cross, while the rest of the Psalm foretells the results of Christ's atonement in imbuing Israel and all the nations to the ends of the earth with the spirit of praise to Jehovah.

The Fathers Delivered, but Christ Abandoned

In verse 4 the Spirit of Christ still speaks. The Lord upon the cross contrasts Himself with pious men of olden days.

"Our fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and others) trusted in Thee; they trusted, and Thou didst deliver them. They cried unto Thee, and were delivered: they trusted in Thee, and were not confounded." Was it not, therefore, contrary to God's past dealings that the Lord Jesus should be forsaken by God in His sufferings, and His cries for deliverance disregarded? Abraham was not perfect in his piety, yet his prayers were heard. Job was noted for his patience in suffering, but showed much impatience with his "friends," and confessed to Jehovah, "Behold, I am vile." Job, too, was heard and delivered.

But when the Messiah in His agony cried out to God, there was silence in the heavens. No arm of Jehovah was outstretched to save Him in that hour. What the will of God had given Him to do, He must do by Himself, enduring all alone, unaided. And in His soul was the bitter sense that in His extremity, God was not helping Him as He had helped the fathers in Israel. Why was this change? Because He, Son of man, Who knew no sin, had been "made sin" to make expiation for sin. Then and then only, for this and for this only, did God forsake His obedient Servant that the glory of "the death of the cross" might shine undimmed throughout the ages of eternity.

But the patience and lowliness of our Lord comes into view in that dark hour. As the forsaken One, He says, "But I am a worm and no man." He accepts a place of nothingness among the sons of men. He obliterates self entirely. Now as always, "Christ pleased not Himself." As a "worm and no man," He surrendered every claim upon divine deliverance. This is the crowning evidence of that Blessed One's perfect humility and self-abnegation. The worm is the symbol of utter weakness, and the Lord Who was "crucified in weakness" applied the figure to Himself to justify the seeming neglect. of His God.

On the cross, the Lord is not oblivious to the thoughts and words of the bystanders. They add to His sorrows and sufferings. He is reproached and despised of the people. They taunt Him because no deliverance comes to Him from God in Whom it was well known that He trusted. But, unperceived by onlookers, Christ in the midst of His crucifixion maintains unbroken confidence in His God (vers. 9-11). As in Bethlehem and Nazareth, in Capernaum and Chorazin, in Bethany and Jerusalem, so at Calvary, Jesus was "the leader and completer of faith" (Heb. xii. 2). Despising the shame of the cross, He abode steadfastly in the will of God according to His own word, "Not My will, but Thine be done." Man mocked, Christ suffered, God was glorified.

At the commencement of His ministry when our Lord was tempted of Satan, He was in the wilderness with the wild beasts (Mark i. 13). When upon the cross, He sees men around Him behaving towards Him like the cruel and shameless beasts that perish. He is beset by "strong bulls of Bashan" and by the "ravens and roaring lion." Unclean and destructive "dogs" have compassed Him about. Nailed to the tree in the midst of them, He is helpless. He is poured out like water. His strength is dried up like a potsherd.

All His bones are out of joint.

Such is the confessed weakness of Christ crucified as the assembly of evil-doers surround Him and work their wicked will on Him Whose hands and feet they have pierced. They strip Him of His raiment and gamble for His vesture. They gloat upon His nakedness as a sight for their wicked hearts to enjoy amid the solemnities of the paschal feast!

In these verses (12-18), Christ by the prophetic Spirit' is describing His sufferings from man as they were multiplied and concentrated at the cross. But throughout, Messiah expresses His unwavering dependence on Jehovah. He says, "Thou art My God. . . Thou art He that took Me out of the womb. . . Thou art My God. . . Be not far from Me" (vers. 9-11). Thus the Christ spreads out before His God the story of His sorrow and suffering from man led on by the prince of this world. All that the power of darkness brought Him in that hour He received as the will of God for Him. As the self-emptied Son of God, He was obedient even down to the death of the cross. And in this lowest depth of humiliation to which He had come, He owns the supreme purpose of God that brought Him there: "Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death" (ver. 15).

The Cry of Conquest, "It is Finished"

But the end comes. The intensity of prayer is replaced by the fervency of praise. The Lord pleads with Jehovah: "O My strength, haste Thee to help Me. Deliver My soul from the sword; My darling (only one) from the power of the dog; save Me from the lion's mouth" (vers. 19-21). Then in the middle of verse 21, the Speaker suddenly changes His tone. Hitherto in the Psalm, unanswered supplication has been His theme. Now, the answer has been given; the reply is received. "Yea, from the horns of the buffaloes (unicorns) hast Thou answered Me."

No statement is made in the Psalm concerning the immeasurable significance of the change from asking to receiving by the One Who at the outset confessed Himself forsaken of God. It is left to us to ponder upon the fact that the same Voice that said to God, "Save Me from the lion's mouth," adds afterwards, "Thou hast heard Me from the horns of the unicorns." The One Who previously said, "O My God, I cry. . . but Thou hearest not" (ver. 2) now declares to Him, "Thou hast heard Me." With strong crying and tears, with prayers and supplications, He had called upon God in His suffering upon the cross as the sin-bearer. Then the moment came when He knew that His work of propitiation for sins had been accomplished, and that because of His piety He had been heard by Him Who was able to save Him out of death (Hebrews v. 7). His piety or holy fear had been tried to the uttermost; and in the very bottomless depths of suffering when abandoned by God on behalf of guilty man His unfaltering obedience shone untarnished and undiminished, approved of God though derided by man.

Now deliverance had come even when He was transfixed by the horns of the unicorns" and under "the power of the dog." The throne of righteousness in heaven and the cross of Calvary on earth were united when Christ Jesus had offered His one sacrifice for sins. His atoning blood was upon the golden mercy-seat beneath the cherubim of glory. His eternally efficacious work of expiation for sin was completed "in the body of His flesh" upon the cross. This fact, the Lord Himself in His omniscience announced to men, to angels, to demons. "When therefore Jesus had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished; and having bowed His head, He delivered up His spirit" (John xix. 30). The apostle John thus records the 'Son of God's verbal testimony to the conclusion of His own work. It was but one word as originally uttered upon the cross, but it fell from the lips of omniscient omnipotence, and will reverberate to the ends of the universe throughout the ages of the ages.

After hearing the Lord's own pronouncement upon the work He had by Himself undertaken in respect of sin that God might be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus, can we entertain the notion that nevertheless something more remained to be done to establish fully the glory of God? Is it possible that when Christ gave Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God, and said, It is finished, there still remained something more to be done in order to make propitiation for sins? Unless supported by plain scripture, such a suggestion by its implications discredits Christ Himself and impoverishes both His word and His work.

Opening the Gates of Praise

The Forsaken One having been heard from the horns of the unicorns, propitiation having been made, the service of praise at once begins. The fragrant odours of the most holy incense mingle with the fumes of the accepted sin-offering. Still with eyes uplifted to heaven, the Captain of salvation, now made "perfect through sufferings," says, "I will declare Thy name to My brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee" (ver. 22). Here is the prophetic promise of the results of an accomplished atonement. The name of God as the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit should be thereupon unfolded, and Christ Himself would be the Leader of worthy praise to God in the midst of His assembled worshippers.

Historically, it was in this strain that our Lord spoke of His God to Mary Magdalene after His resurrection. He said, "I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God and your God" (John 20:17), a declaration not made nor true before. But now atonement for sin had been made, the righteousness of God in respect of His grace had been established, and it was consistent with the glory of God that a new relationship of believers should be announced. Accordingly through the work finished upon the cross,

our Lord associated His feeble and failing disciples with Himself as His brethren. Now they were entitled, not merely because they had been born afresh by water and by the Spirit, but because of Christ's offered and accepted sacrifice for sins, to stand before God as sons in an acceptance like that of Christ Himself—"My Father and your Father." Being raised from the dead "by the glory of the Father," the Lord connects His own with Himself as His brethren. As He had said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit (John xii. 24). "My God" was the cry of the Lord when alone and forsaken, when bearing our sins in His body; none could then share that cry. But now He says to His brethren, "My God and your God." This new link was the firstfruits of Christ's atoning sufferings and death.

But the harvest follows the firstfruits. Throughout the remaining stanzas of this psalm, the unfolding of ever widening circles of praise to Jehovah continues. All the seed of Jacob and of Israel shall glorify and fear Him. 'All the ends of the earth and the families of the nations shall remember, shall turn unto Him, and shall worship before Him. And in the concluding verse, we read, "They shall come and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He has done this." The final phrase, "that He hath done this (it)" is suggestive. The words are general, and some might ask, Who has done it? and What has He done? But to every spiritual mind the reference is obvious. It is the unrivaled act of making propitiation performed by Christ on the cross, where He was set forth as a mercy-seat to declare the righteousness of God in respect of sins (Romans 3:23-26).

Christ Himself in His utterance, "It is finished," was the first witness to His own completed work. His followers, led by the Spirit of God, have continued that testimony on earth throughout succeeding generations. Expiation for sins is the foundation of all praise, worship, and service. And heaven and earth shall yet unite in ascribing all worthiness to the Lamb that was slain. Every heart and voice of the redeemed shall joyfully confess to the glory of God that "He hath done this."

Let this psalm, beloved friends speak continually to us of "the affliction of the afflicted" One (ver. 24); and may it awaken our songs of praise, imparting to them a holy savour befitting the sanctuary of God and the presence of Christ. His sufferings and sacrificial death form the everlasting basis of acceptable worship. The Father seeks worship in spirit and truth. Who can render this save those who know Christ Jesus and who rest in faith upon His finished work! May we have the happy experience that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the midst of His assembly as the Leader and Theme of its praises as often as we remember that "He hath done this" and indeed whenever we gather unto His name.

Pressed Out of Measure

James Brown

Job 3:1 "After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed his day".

Jeremiah 20:14 "Cursed be the day that I was born".

1 Corinthians 1:8 "...we were pressed out of measure...we despaired even of life".

Within the trio of worthies noted above are three uniquely different circumstances that evoke the same desperate response. We might express it in modern-day terms as, "I can't take this anymore". The apostle Paul is the only one of the three who does not vocalize a wish to have never been born, yet we cannot assume his despair was any less intense. Job, as chapters one and two make clear, was being tested by Satan to, as it were, sift him as wheat before God, even as he also attempted to do with Peter. Job's sorrow and bewilderment lay in the fact of not being able to ascertain the cause-and-effect sense, that is, the "why" of his current miseries, especially his deep concern that he had lost communion with God. Jeremiah, the prophet who received and faithfully delivered God's message to Israel for the pending doom of the Babylonian siege and captivity, was being systematically beaten down by men like Pashur (Jeremiah 20:1-3) and other religious leaders in Judah who hated Jeremiah because he refused to prophesy peace unto them. On two occasions, (Jeremiah 37:16 and 38:6) he was cast into pits by the princes of Judah and left to languish. And Paul, representing the Lord on behalf of His church, encountered manifold opposition while trying to teach sinners the gospel message and instruct the saints. He recounts all of it in 2 Corinthians 11:25-28. Were only nature involved, given the list he provides in these four verses, one would understand Paul joining Job and Jeremiah in their momentary lapse of faith and deep depression. But he didn't.

A man who had been tried in the many ways listed by Paul could pen words of comfort to others (2 Corinthians 1:4) who might suffer as he did. Those words are found in 1 Corinthians 10:13 as follows: "There hath no temptation (trial) taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted (tried) above that ye are able; but with the temptation (trial) also make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it". Thinking of Paul wrestling with "fightings without and fears within" when he came to Macedonia (2 Corinthians 7:5), as modern day believers, there may be, as we endure our own trials, a temptation to downplay Paul's sufferings since, as we reason, his faith was so much greater than ours. Or we assert that God granted him some extra special spiritual armament that most of us do not possess since none of us has ever been commissioned to be the one man to bring the

gospel to the entire known Gentile world. Those thoughts move dangerously close to wrongfully surmising that the Lord Jesus Himself can never fully understand our trials as mortal sinners since He was the Eternal Son of God; thereby, He never was in the desperate position of having to experience failure as we do. Hebrews 4:15 says otherwise, stating that our Great High Priest is, indeed, "touched with the feelings of our infirmities", whatever they may be.

So back to Job and Jeremiah. Is it possible that one's circumstances in life could become so intolerable that thoughts of suicide, or at least, wishing one had never been born, are entertained in our minds as preferable, even plausible options? Well, we'd be better men and women than Job if we didn't. Things can actually get that bad, God knows. Job 10:18-19 shows that his desire to have remained unborn was not just a flickering moment during his Satan-inflicted crucible. The fact that Job and Jeremiah may be the only two believers the Bible ever records expressing their desire out loud does not mean that others didn't imagine the same. Even Solomon, in his grief over the sad results of not withholding his heart from any joy (pleasure), congratulates those already dead, and further notes that those who have never been born are "better off" so as not to see the evil done under the sun (Ecclesiastes 4:2-3). In fact, we read of the Lord Jesus stating that in the case of Judas, it would have been better for him not to have been born (Mark 14:21). The unrelenting pressures of life, the frustrations of the world and its godless opinions, the powerful harassment of Satan, and the problem of indwelling sin all serve to further Satan's desire to cause us to, first of all, make shipwreck (1 Timothy 1:19), no longer holding faith with a good conscience and subsequently, as to usefulness, be regarded by God as a castaway (1 Corinthians 9:27). What would be left for anyone after that? Thankfully, God can and will restore such a person if and when there is a willingness to return to Him.

Job while experiencing extreme physical pain, the loss of his children and possessions, and receiving no help from his self-righteous friends who blamed him for his current predicament, lost a proper sight of God; as a result, he lapsed in faith, and justified himself, while his enemies, for a time, seemed to have the upper hand. Would you and I have done better under that same pressure? He was, indeed, pressed out of measure. As an aside, a careful study of the book of Job may help us when we witness someone enduring a difficult trial, to guard us from using terms that are *not* helpful. It would seem Job's friends' best contribution was when they held their peace for an entire week! Even a fool is considered wise when he shuts his lips (Proverbs 17:28).

On the other hand, Jeremiah was no fool, but he was forced to be quiet as to his damning prophecy about Judah, a tribe so fully steeped in idolatry and now the object of God's impending fury. Fools enjoy hearing

themselves speak but cannot stand for the truth set forth by a wise man. So, twice they locked him up in dungeons. That treatment was something he did object to; it wasn't enjoyable. However, the lion's share of Jeremiah's depression was two-fold and not so much related to his own sufferings but for God's chosen people. His heart was steadfast as to the sentence against Judah he must deliver from God, yes, but he wept over both their disobedience and over the consequence of great suffering they would endure because of their rebellion against God. When he penned the words of Lamentations 1:12-13, the "my sorrow" he was referring to was that of Jerusalem, speaking in first person after the fact of what happened to them. Clearly, in principle, we can apply the sentiment to what the Lord suffered at Calvary to put away sin, but the context is strictly Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah's heart-rending trial was one of great empathy and sympathy for Judah and Jerusalem throughout the book by his name and in his Lamentations.

The trials of these three men (Job, Jeremiah, and Paul) are notable but there is another aspect to this. While Job's story has a happy ending whereby Job was blessed more at the end of his trial than before it, Jeremiah and Paul's stories don't end that way. In Jeremiah's case, he was forcefully taken by a band of Jewish rebels who left Judah to live in Egypt in Jeremiah 43-45. After that, no scriptures give us help as to what became of him but several extrabiblical writings confirm that Jeremiah was possibly one of the men referred to in Hebrews 11:37 who was stoned to death. Suffice it to say, apart from Nebuchadnezzar's willingness to spare his life in Babylon (Jeremiah 39:11-14), Jeremiah's life serving God was often very miserable before and during the Babylonian siege and captivity. To be challenged at every turn, imprisoned, and fully discredited as to presenting the true prophecies of God can wear the best of men down. As for Paul, his post-conversion life was marked by multiple hardships and near-death experiences and, according to the early church historian, Eusebius, ended by way of beheading in the late 60s A.D., joining the other apostles in martyrdom, who lost their lives because they preached Christ and Him crucified.

Reading the paragraphs above, we can conclude a few things as to what God tells us about our trials. First, they are not allowed nor given to us randomly. We mishandle them when we become irritated or pressed out of measure. God has specific designs for each of us and though His dross-purging style may rile up our unruly flesh, we learn eventually, that there are Christian virtues to be developed through these trials (James 1:2-4). They may involve chastening (Hebrews 12:6-12) to produce "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" in us. After such growth in grace, we also benefit as becoming more partakers of the Lord's sufferings (1 Peter 4:13), desiring to know the fellowship of His sufferings as did Paul (Philippians 3:10) and in measure, we can be enabled by

God to treat "our light affliction" as being truly light and brief by comparison with our "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Even professional weightlifters echo the principle, "No pain, no gain". Another thing one might consider is that the devil never takes special aim at someone who is not exercised to please and honor God. Dear saint, if you find yourself in a fairly severe situation where you are tempted to adopt the language of Job or Jeremiah, wishing you'd never been born, or that of Paul, acknowledging he was pressed out of measure, take heart in the fact that though Satan would likely love to see you shipwrecked and a castaway, God sees you in an entirely different light and desires that out of those trials, he can bring you and me forth as gold and silver after the trial has scraped off some of our pesky dross (Proverbs 25:4). Could it be that this is, at least in part, what God means by having "predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son"? (Romans 8:29).

As a final note, again referring back to Job's "friends", let us always be mindful of the frailty of our brethren and sisters, whatever it is they are going through. Many times we try to help vocally, but without any firsthand experience of their unique suffering we, like Job's wife, might be urged by the devil to utter something thoughtless and hurtful like, "Get over it!" or "It can't be all *that* bad!". We all have breaking points whereby we might speak or act unadvisedly. Moses lost his temper at the Horeb rock. David axed, sawed through, and burned those Ammonites in Rabbah, Job became sarcastic with his friends, and Paul called the high priest a "whited wall". When one of the Lord's sheep are going through a trial, Ephesians 4:32 is a sound piece of advice for us who are too often tempted to offer the wrong kind of advice when all that is really needed by those who are pressed out of measure, for the time being, is a sympathetic ear.

"Now, lukewarm professor, what do worldlings see in you? They see a man, who says he is going to heaven, but who is only traveling at a snail's pace. He professes to believe that there is a hell, yet he has tearless eyes, and never seeks to snatch souls from going down into the pit. They see before them one who has to deal with eternal realities, yet he is but half awake; one who professes to have passed through a transformation so mysterious and wonderful that there must be, if it is true, a vast change in the outward life as the result of it; yet they see him as much like themselves as can be. He may be morally consistent in his general behavior, but they see no energy in his religious character."

(Spurgeon)

Names of a Local Assembly and its Composition

Joel Portman

A Definition of a local assembly: A company of baptized believers, gathered by the Spirit of God into an established, continuing local testimony, being guided by elders, enjoying fellowship in spiritual things, being taught Scriptural truths, displaying submission to Christ and His Word, exercised in worship and service, meeting regularly as described in the New Testament to bring honor to the Lord Jesus, and constituting a center for gospel witness to go forth in the area.

NAMES AND TITLES OF A LOCAL ASSEMBLY

1. **Churches of God** I Corinthians 11:16, I Thessalonians 2:14, 2 Thessalonians 1:4
 Their Derivation and Power
 Sets apart from pagan, idolatrous places of their worship, these acknowledged by God
 Note: "Church of God" in I Corinthians 15:9 Likely only indicating the assembly in Jerusalem.
 Church of God never used of the entire aspect of the Church.

2. **Churches of Christ** Romans 16:16
 Their Lord and Owner, Center
3. **Churches of the Saints** I Corinthians 14:33
 Their Composition, Members
4. **Churches of the Gentiles** Romans 16:4
 Their Origin
5. **Churches of Galatia, Asia, etc.** I Corinthians 16:1, Galatians 1:2
 Their Location
6. **A Body of Christ** I Corinthians 12:27
 Unity, Mutual involvement
7. **A Chaste Virgin** 2 Corinthians 11:2
 Their Purity
8. **A Little Flock** Luke 12:32, Acts 20:28-29,
 I Peter 5:2-3
 Dependence, Shepherd Care
9. **A Temple** I Corinthians 3:17, Ephesians 2:21
 Worship, Sanctity
10. **God's Husbandry** I Corinthians 3:9
 Fruitfulness, Fellowship
11. **God's Building** I Corinthians 3:9
 Workmanship, plan, pattern
12. **House of God** I Timothy 3:15
 Dwelling, Government, Order
13. **Pillar and Ground of the Truth** I Tim. 3:15
 Foundation, Upholder, Purpose
14. **Golden Lampstand** Rev. 1:12, 20
 Testimony linked with Deity

Names used are "all inclusive," never divisive, i.e., NOT only used of certain ones, but including all assemblies, except for geographic designations.

COMPOSITION OF A LOCAL ASSEMBLY

1. BELIEVERS, SAINTS, PEOPLE OF GOD, CHRISTIANS

- A. Saved with a clear testimony of salvation Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:40-41, 4:4, 9:19, 28
- B. Baptized by immersion in obedience to the Lord's command Acts 2:40-41, 9:18-19, 1 Corinthians 1:13-16
No unbaptized believer ever found in an assembly in the New Testament!
- C. Willing to be subject to the Word of God, to be taught, to submit to the authority of the assembly
Matthew 18:17-18, 20 ("unto the Name" signifies subjection to authority)
- D. Exercised about holy living, consistent in life and testimony to represent the assembly and its standards before others. Matthew 28:20, Acts 2:42-47, 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10, 2:11-14
- E. Willing to accept responsibility, participate fully in assembly and its activities Acts 9:28
"one accord" 7x in Acts regarding believers in local assemblies

- 2. FROM AMONG BELIEVERS BUT PART OF THEM (not a separate, elevated group) :**
Elders (Presbuters), Overseers (Bishops), Shepherds, pastors.
(Always in Plural)
Deacons, ministers, servants

Our Lord, in defining eternal life, summed up the supreme goal of human existence: "That they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." And Paul revealed the one overpowering interest of his life when he wrote "That I may know him." The business of the Church is God. She is purest when most engaged with God and she is astray just so far as she follows other interests, no matter how religious or humanitarian they may be. There are a thousand useful, even noble, pursuits in which the Church may engage and which may bring her the plaudits of the world but which are nevertheless unworthy of her utter devotion. Such are social activities for their own sake, philosophical pursuits divorced from Him in whom all wisdom and knowledge is hidden away, art, music, education, travel, to name a mere few. As these things come to the Christian in his pursuit of God they may have a proper and useful place in his life; but when they are chosen as ends to be followed they are and can only be cheap substitutes for the glory that excelleth.

A. W. Tozer