

Seeking My King & His Kingdom

#14 The Furnace Of Affliction

Psalm 34:19 "Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the LORD will deliver him from them all."

Ex. 3:7 The LORD said, "I have certainly seen the affliction [oppression] of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry caused by their slave masters.

Ex. 1:11-14 So the Egyptians placed supervisors over them, oppressing them with heavy burdens. The Israelites built the supply cities of Pithom and Rameses for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more the Egyptians afflicted the Israelites, the more they multiplied and flourished, so that the Egyptians became terrified of the Israelites. ¹³ The Egyptians ruthlessly forced the Israelites to serve them, ¹⁴ making their lives bitter through hard labor with mortar, bricks, and all kinds of outdoor labor. They ruthlessly imposed all this work on them.

Ex. 3:8-10 I have come down to deliver them from their domination by the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, ... The cry of the Israelites has come to my attention about how severely the Egyptians have been oppressing them. ¹⁰ So go! I am sending you to Pharaoh. Bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." [God will establish Mediatorial Kingdom with Moses as the mediator.]

Isa. 48:10 "Behold, I have refined you, but not like silver: I have purified you [chosen you] in the furnace of affliction." [oppression, humiliation]

Consider: He has chosen us not in the place of ease and tranquility of spirit, but in the furnace of affliction. The furnace of affliction becomes the proving ground of my Christian life and experience.

I. The Furnace is DIVINELY APPOINTED

Afflictions are not the result of chance or blind fate.

Afflictions do not arise out of the dust [Job 5:6].

Afflictions are not to be traced to secondary causes.

Afflictions are not merely the work of our enemies.

Afflictions come by the wise and gracious arrangement of God's divine providence.

I Thess. 3:3 "So that no one would be shaken by these afflictions;

for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this!"

Micah 6:9 "Heed the rod, and the One who appointed it!"

Consider: All of God's elect have been in the furnace of affliction!

1. Adam and Eve first experienced it when they sinned and were expelled from the Garden of Eden.

a. Two sons: Cain & Abel - One son lies as a lifeless corpse

b. Abel was in the furnace of his brother's enmity and persecution.

2. Time passes and where is the child of God?
 - a. You find Noah who is laughed at, hissed at, hooted as a fool, a simpleton building a ship upon dry land, standing in the furnace of slander and laughter.
 3. Time marches on: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; "these were God's tried people."
 4. Where are God's people in Egypt? Look to the brick kilns of Egypt. In the furnace
 5. Moses suffered with God's people in the furnace of the wilderness.
 - a. The fiery serpent hissed upon them; the sun scorched them;
 - b. They lacked water and bread supplied only by miracle.
 6. Time passes to the time of King Saul? Where was the man after God's own heart?
 - a. He is in the caves of Engedi seeking refuge from his bloodthirsty enemies.
 7. Where are God's children during the time of Ahab & Jezebel?
 - a. They are hidden by fifties in the cave, and fed by bread and water.
 - b. A man upon the mountain top wrapping his shaggy garment round him
 - At one time his dwelling is by the rippling brook, where ravens bring him bread and flesh.
 - A widow is his host, whose only possessions are a little oil and a handful of meal
 8. Jeremiah and Isaiah were cruelly treated.
 9. Daniel was put in the lions' den.
 10. Apostles were persecuted and suffered cruel deaths.
 11. Close to 1 million Christians were murdered by different popes.
- Spurgeon: "The march of the army of God may be tracked by their ashes left behind them. The church left behind it blazing fires of persecution and trouble. The path of the just is scarred on earth's breast. The monuments of the Church are the sepulchres of her martyrs. Earth has been ploughed with deep furrows wherever they have lived. You will not find the saints of God where you do not find the furnace burning round about them."

Consider: The wise man sees the hand of God in *affliction* as well as in *affluence*.

Every event is either of His appointment or it has His all-wise permission.

Eph. 1:11 God works all things after the counsel of His own will

II. Why Does God Put His Children In The Furnace?

1. It is the stamp of the covenant.
 - a. Some documents to be legal must have a government stamp.
 - b. The stamp of the covenant consists of two stamps.

Genesis 15:17 When Abraham was lying down at night, a horror of darkness came upon him, and God made a covenant with him, and it is said, "And it came to pass, that when the sun went down and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace and a burning lamp passed between the pieces."

- c. These two "stamps" made the covenant secure:
 - "a burning lamp"—the light for God's people; light for their darkness, and beside the lamp
 - "a smoking furnace"

Question by Spurgeon: Should I ask to be free of the smoking furnace? No! that would invalidate the whole! Therefore will I cheerfully bear it, since it is absolutely necessary to render that covenant valid.

2. All Precious Things Have To Be Tried.

a. Gold must be tried; it cannot be used as it is dug up from the mine, or in grains as it is found in the rivers. It must pass through the crucible and the dross removed.

b. All things of any value must endure the fire.

Prov. 17:3 "The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold." If you were nothing but tin, there would be no need of the "fining-pot" for you; but it is simply because you are valuable that you must be tried.

3. The Christian Is Said To Be A Sacrifice To God.

a. Every sacrifice must be burned with fire.

b. They killed the bullock and laid it on the altar, but it was no sacrifice till they burned it.

c. They slew the lamb, they laid the wood; but there was no sacrifice in the killing of the lamb till it was burned.

d. Know ye not, brethren, we are offerings to God, and that we are a living sacrifice unto Jesus Christ. But how could we be a sacrifice if we were not burned? If we never had the fire of trouble, if we never were kindled, we should lie there without smoke, without flame, unacceptable to God. But because you are His sacrifice, therefore you must be burned;

4. Without The Furnace We Would Not Be At All Like Jesus Christ.

a. Rev. 1:15: "His feet were like glowing bronze refined in a furnace

Consider: If He walked through the flames, must not we do the same?—that "in all things he might be like unto his brethren."

b. We look forward to being like Christ when He comes.

Question: Why do I fear to be like Him here? Will I not tread where my Savior trod?

Spurgeon: Onward, Christian! The captain of your salvation hath gone through the dark valley before you—therefore, onward! Onward with boldness! Onward with courage! Onward with hope! That you may be like your Savior and participate in His sufferings.

Rom.8:18 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, IF indeed we Share In His Sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.

III. The Design of the Furnace is BENEFICIAL

1. It is for our everlasting good, and for His glory.

a. Designed to mature us and to fit us for His service now and eternally

Richard Sibbes "The winter prepares the earth for the spring, so do afflictions sanctified prepare the soul for glory."

Heb. 6:1 Therefore, leaving behind the elementary teachings about the Messiah, let us continue to be carried along to maturity,...

2. Prevent us from going astray

Ps. 119:67 "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Your Word"

Ps. 119:71 "It is *good* for me that I have been afflicted — that I might learn Your statutes"

3. Afflictions wean us from the evil world.

Ps. 66:10-12 For you, God, tested us, to purify us like fine silver. You have led us into a trap and set burdens on our backs. ¹² You caused men to ride over us.

You brought us through fire and water, but you Led Us To Abundance.

a. When Egypt became an iron furnace — the Israelites became weary of it.

b. The prodigal thought of his father when he experienced famine.

c. The Lord makes this world a grief so we will never make it our paradise.

4. Afflictions Test Our Religious Profession.

Job 23:10 "But He knows the way that I take! When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

We profess to be *soldiers* in the army of the King of kings. We claim to fight under the banner of the Lord Almighty. Therefore the Lord allows us to be attacked by *Satan* and assaulted by the *world* with afflictions and persecutions — to try us. Cowards will yield early in the fight.

Real soldiers will stand and fight to the death, but a traitor will join with the enemy.

II Tim. 2:3 You therefore endure hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

5. The Furnace Of Affliction Grows Us In Christian Graces.

Rom. 5:3-4"We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."

God afflicts us with severe trials so these graces will be produced in us; otherwise they would lie dormant with us.

6. The Furnace Is Necessary to Stir Us To Prayer

Isa. 26:16 LORD, they came to you in distress; they poured out their secret prayer when your chastenings were afflicting them."

7. Jesus Is With Me In The Furnace of Affliction

a. Jesus comes to the desolate places to be with us.

Isa. 41:10 Don't be afraid, because I'm with you; don't be anxious, because I am your God.

I keep on strengthening you; I'm truly helping you. I'm surely upholding you with my victorious right hand."

Isa. 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I'll be with you; and through the rivers, they won't sweep over you. when you walk through fire you won't be scorched, and the flame won't set you ablaze.

Heb. 12:10-11 Affliction is "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness."

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however,

for those who have been trained by it, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.

8. Afflictions Prepare Us For Greater Usefulness And Fruitfulness.

This act flows from both the justice and compassion of God.

John 15:2 "Every branch that bears fruit, He *prunes* it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

Spurgeon: The *right hand of His mercy*, knows what the *left hand of His severity* is doing!
Deut. 4:20 For the LORD took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace—out of Egypt—To Be The People Of His Inheritance, as you are today.

Presently, the Lord is fashioning my inward spiritual life for crowns and thrones in coming His Kingdom. The oppression, the piercings, the anguish, the disappointments, and all events — are but the preparation for the position we shall occupy in His Kingdom and the world to come.

Consider: When God's grace enables us to see the hand of God in all events, we can bear these without murmuring or complaining.

1. Job lost his family, his wealth, and his good health, yet he consoled himself:

Job 23:14 "For He performs [will complete] what is appointed for me, He has many things in mind for me!"

2. David suffered much from his enemies and his family, yet he said:

Ps. 31:15 "My times are in Your hand!"

Ps. 39:9 "I remain silent; I do not open my mouth for You are the one who acted!"

3. When Eli was told his family tree would be cut off, he said to Samuel:

I Sam. 3:18 "He is the LORD; let Him do what is good in His eyes!"

4.

When Hezekiah was told by the Prophet Isaiah that his sons would be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon, he said:

Isa. 39:8 "The word of the LORD you have spoken is good."

When we find ourselves in a very dark chapter of the book of Divine Providence, rest upon the words of our Lord:

John 13:7 "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand!"

These trials that come your way are not the mere product of caprice and chance.

You are not the victim of empty and vexatious circumstance. You are a child of the King!

You are the clay on the potter's wheel. The pressure may come.

I Peter 2:20-21 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. ²¹ For You Have Been Called For This Purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

II Tim. 3:12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

Philippians 1:19 For you have been granted [the privilege] for Christ's sake not only to believe in (adhere to, rely on, and trust in) Him, but also to suffer in His behalf.

Acts 5:41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

I Pet. 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you are involved in various trials,
³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ But you must let
endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

I Pet. 1:6 You greatly Rejoice In This, even though you have to suffer various kinds of trials
for a little while, [What is THIS?]

I Pet. 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His
great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus
Christ from the dead, ⁴ to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not
fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

I Pet. 1:6-9 You greatly Rejoice In This, even though you have to suffer various kinds of trials
for a little while, These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith - of greater
worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may result in praise, glory and
honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even
though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and
glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

God is looking for individuals who will step into places of ministry and effective testimony.
To fit His workers properly, He often has to plunge them into the fires.

II Cor. 12:9 My grace is all you need, because my power is perfected in weakness." Therefore,
I will most happily boast about my weaknesses, so that the Messiah's power may rest on me.

This is the testing time, but it is also the CHOOSING TIME, for God chooses His workers and
fits them for higher ministry in the times and in the places of distress and difficulty.

The Psalmist speaks: "Thou didst enlarge me when I was in distress."

This is the testimony you will hear repeatedly as you find out what preceded ministries that are
effective for the glory of God.

GOD ENLARGED ME WHEN I WAS IN DISTRESS.

Spurgeon: "The Lord gets his best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction."

II Cor. 4:16-18 That's why we are not discouraged. No, even if outwardly we are wearing out,
inwardly we are being renewed each and every day. ¹⁷ This light, temporary nature of our
suffering is Producing For Us an everlasting weight of glory, far beyond any
comparison, ¹⁸ because we do not look for things that can be seen but for things that cannot be
seen. For things that can be seen are temporary, but things that cannot be seen are eternal.

Heb. 12:2 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 has sat down at the right hand of the
throne of God.

Heb. 10:35 So don't lose your confidence, since it holds a great reward for you.