

### **When the Going Gets Tough!**

***“Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’ The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering. “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again.”***

Who is stronger? A ten-year old child or a baby held in my arms? You would think the ten-year old child. He can run. He can jump. He can pick up that baby. The baby just lies there. But it is the baby who is stronger because the baby is held by me. I am stronger than the ten-year old child. I can even hold the baby and the ten-year old child at the same time. The child is stronger than the baby, but because the helpless baby is held by me, it is my strength that matters, not the baby’s.

Friends, you probably heard of the phrase, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” That makes sense, and we all have heroes who did not give up under the greatest strain. But in our text, we will learn an uncomfortable truth: when the going gets tough, even the tough crumble. Sure, we may win a little battle here or there, times we gut it out and survive. But in the end, we all must crumble. But we learn that we are the strongest when we become helpless children who dare to rely upon God’s strength and not our own. Let’s humble ourselves today. Let’s be weak so we may be strong in the Lord’s arms.

#### *I. The going gets tough.*

I want you to listen to a tough man. His name was Job. When the going got tough, he at first stood strong. When his kids died and his wealth and possessions all taken away (and he was one of the richest men around), he stood tough when he praised God. When his wife was confused by his toughness, he rebuked her. He reminded her they accepted good from God. Why shouldn’t they accept the bad as well?

But even the tough crumble. When three friends came to Job, they talked. They thought they were helping, but in the end their advice was all wrong. Instead of helping Job focus on the Lord in his suffering, they told him to focus on himself. His friends lived under the world’s philosophy. It goes like this: if you do good, God will reward you, and if you do bad, God will punish you. We see it in society. Break the law, you should be punished. We see it in so many churches: pray hard enough, then God will answer. They told Job his suffering must be his fault, otherwise God would not be punishing him like this.

Job listened to his friends. As a result, Job took his eyes off God and focused on himself. Look at what this did to him in our text. ***“Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’ The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering. “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again.”***

See what happens when we take our eyes off God? Experts rightly make a distinction between suffering and pain. Pain is the discomfort, the hurt we feel when something is wrong like a toothache. Suffering is the effect on us emotionally and spiritually. It is when we get depressed and feel hopeless. Job had pain but he was also suffering. He compared himself to a man who works hard wishing night would come, but when night comes, he tosses and turns and wishes it was day again. No relief.

Let’s just analyze Job’s suffering for a moment. Note how Job is speaking in the first person. “I, me,” “I have been allotted months of futility,” “My body is clothed with worms.” Suffering focuses on me. A man can come home depressed from work. All he sees are his problems. He doesn’t see or appreciate the kids who run up and hug him, crying, “Daddy.” He doesn’t see his wife’s smile. He doesn’t see a happy home. “My eyes will never see happiness again,” the sufferer concludes.

This is the reality of suffering. And it is true, if you leave God out of it, life loses all meaning. Our days are only a breath. They go by as fast as a weaver’s hand, or in today’s terminology, as fast as a teenager can text. And they are full of hard service. Why work hard if someone else spends your money? Why raise a family to only face trouble? Why do anything?

#### *II. When the going gets tough, God gets going.*

Let’s stop looking at ourselves. Let’s pull the curtains back and see a world out there known as the Kingdom of God. As we do, we can dispel some of the myths about suffering.

The first myth is that our suffering is due to something we did or some sin we committed. That is only a myth. God does punish sin. He punishes each sin with the fury of hell itself. But is God punish believers for their sins? The answer is no. The key is the cross. On the cross God punished our sins, but it wasn’t us being punished. It was Jesus being punished in our place. As Isaiah puts it, ***“The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*** Paul reinforces that when he says, ***“God made him who had no***

***sin to be sin for us, so that in him we become the righteousness of God.***” Every sin you have, do and will commit has been punished already in Jesus on the cross. This means that God is not punishing you!

Another myth is that Christians never get down or depressed. Yes, we have many fine examples in the Bible of Christians facing the severest trials, people like Stephen who asked God to forgive those who were stoning him to death, or Paul and Silas who were whipped and imprisoned and yet they sang hymns. These examples inspire us. But it is a myth that Christians don't have their down moments, too. Elijah sat under a tree thinking he was the only believer left and wished he was never born. David would lay awake, sleepless at night, crying tears over the sins he committed.

Christians have their moments of grief and depression. Remember, we are redeemed children of God, righteous in his sight because of Christ, but we are still sons and daughters of Adam, sinful human beings who often doubt God or his motives. Then we look at Paul or Stephen or that fellow member two pews ahead, and instead of being inspired by them, we are shamed because we are not strong like them. We are afraid to admit we hurt, afraid to admit we have our doubts and fears.

But this is a myth. Every family in our congregation has its own problems and burdens. That person you admire also has problems. You may not see them. And when we focus only on ourselves, we feel like that cartoon character who has that little cloud raining on him no matter where he goes. But you are not a freak. What is happening to you happens to others. And Jesus knows. That is why he invites you to come to him, all who are weary and burdened and he will give you rest. Don't hide from God when you see your faults. Run to him.

A third myth we wish to debunk this morning is the myth that God doesn't care, or worse, he doesn't exist. Yes, it is true, while we live in this world, we must deal with suffering everyday. You can't stand in a hog barn without the smell of hogs clinging to your clothes. We can't live in this world without experiencing the pain of this world.

But it is also true that God could remove pain and suffering from your life. Do you know how much pain God has removed from you already? But God doesn't remove all your pain; in fact, he may even give the devil permission to inflict more. How could a loving God do that? Because he loves us, that's why. You heard it earlier in our reading from Romans. God works everything out for our good. Everything means everything even bad things like pain and suffering. What if God removed all your pain and trouble? What if earth felt more like paradise? Would you want to leave this world? I doubt it. Remember, God wants us in heaven. If it means contrasting how rotten this world is to heaven, then please do so, Lord.

And that is how suffering serves our good. As Paul stated, ***“We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint that.”*** Suffering strengthens us when we humble ourselves as a helpless child in the arms of the Father. Then we no longer rely on our job, the checkbook, our health, good looks, anything, but only on him alone. Then we rely on the Lord. If suffering humbles us and moves us to the Lord, then it is surely good.

And in his arms we find hope. God doesn't offer us any explanations for our suffering (he never told Job why). He doesn't give us any deep philosophic arguments or locker room pep talks. He simply answers our pain with Jesus who cries with us, who grimaces in pain with us, who died for us. Jesus not only felt pain; he suffered, too. Jesus wondered if there was another way besides the cross. Jesus himself even asked, “Why?” when he questioned, “Why have you forsaken me?” Jesus became us in every way, even in hopeless despair when he carried our sin. But shortly afterward he said, “Into your hands I commit my spirit.” Because he did that, we can do that, too. We can die in confidence that God is holding us all the way to heaven. That is why the cross and Jesus is the key. This too shall pass. Look at what is coming.

When the going gets tough, don't tough it out yourself. Be humble. Like a helpless infant, let the Lord hold you. Let his strength be your strength, his love your comfort, his heaven your hope. Yes, Job is right. Our earthly life is short and full of toil and restlessness. But unlike our text, when we look beyond ourselves, we can say, “Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will see happiness again.” We will. Amen.