

God's Intention When He Permits Us To Endure Afflictions.

Text: John 4:46-54

1) God Does That To Keep Us From Losing The Faith

Suggested Hymns:

2) God Does That To Strengthen Our Faith

367, 207, 321, 352, 395

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 4:46-54, ***⁴⁶ So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.***

⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." ⁴⁹ The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

⁵¹ And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!" ⁵² Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him."

⁵³ So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household. ⁵⁴ This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

A twofold miracle is recorded in our Gospel. The first miracle is, that a nobleman believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Who would think that a nobleman, an attendant at the court of King Herod, where Jesus was held in contempt, would come to the faith? A believing nobleman in those times and under such prevailing circumstances must be looked upon as a wonderful miracle.

The second miracle is the healing of the nobleman's son by Christ. This man's boy was at the point of death. And how did Christ heal him? Not in the ordinary way, with medicine, or by physical treatment, but by His simple word spoken at a far distance.

Cana, where Jesus spoke the word which instantly stopped the young lad's fever, was about 50 km from Capernaum, where the poor boy was suffering from a deadly disease. This was certainly a glorious divine miracle, a miracle which surpasses human understanding.

There is, however, one important point in our Gospel to which we need to call special attention. The nobleman was a believer. He was a child of God. God loved him as a father loves his child.

But does God exempt him from the ills and misfortunes of this life? No; he is greatly afflicted. Illness enters his pleasant home. His dear child is stricken with a deadly fever and is brought to the point of death.

Now why does God, the Ruler and Governor of the world, permit such things to come to pass? Why does He allow His dear children to endure afflictions? Why does He let tribulations and sorrow and distress come upon those whom He loves?

Why does He not let all the days in a Christian's life glide along like a smooth stream, uninterrupted by the rocks of misfortune, and by the cataracts of despair, and by the whirlpools of affliction?

Let us consider, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, *God's Intention When He Permits Us To Endure Afflictions*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. God Permits Us To Endure Afflictions To Keep Us From Losing The Faith

The beginning of our Gospel reads, "*And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.*"

The nobleman was a true believer, or else he would not have thought of going to Jesus and asking Him to come down and heal his son. He had full confidence in Jesus' power to save his son from the jaws of death.

This is so much all the more remarkable because, as we read at the end of our Gospel, “⁵⁴ *This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.*” It happened in the first year of Christ’s ministry. His first miracle He had performed only a few months ago at the same place where the nobleman found Him, at Cana, where at a wedding He had turned water into wine.

This, most likely, was all that the nobleman knew of Christ’s miracle working power. He had, as yet, not heard of a single instance where Jesus had healed a disease. Still he firmly believed that Jesus could heal his son for whom the physicians had given up hope.

However, the nobleman appears to be a very shy believer. Previous to the ailment of his son, it seems, he was very cautious and careful not to betray himself and thereby to bring upon his person the scorn, ridicule, and perhaps, the persecution of his friends at court.

He did not dare to make an open profession of his faith in the Lord Jesus. He kept his faith secret. Even when John the Baptist was cast into prison by King Herod, the nobleman did not dare to stand up for the convictions of his own heart. We are not informed that he had testified against the deed.

It is plain that this state of affairs could not last. It would be impossible for the nobleman to keep the faith under such conditions. He would lose the faith altogether before long.

And what is done? God sees that the man does not wilfully resist the Holy Spirit. He sees that the man truly loves His divine Word. He sees that soon a catastrophe may come in which this man will make a shipwreck concerning the faith.

So God comes to his rescue by means of affliction. He touches him in the most tender spot. He lets a deadly disease take a firm hold of his son, the joy of his heart. And what is the effect of God’s wonderful dealings?

The dying embers of the nobleman’s faith are revived. When all hopes for the recovery of his beloved child are gone, when the physicians stand at the bedside of the little sufferer who is burning with fever, and shake their heads, and say they can do no more, the poor father’s thoughts turn to Jesus, to Jesus whom he loved and whom he had almost forgotten.

Oh if Jesus was only here, thinks he, He could save my child! And now he no more minds the scorn, ridicule, and persecution of King Herod and of his friends at court. He makes an open profession of his faith in the Lord Jesus. He does that by leaving his dying child and hastening, as fast as he can get there, to Cana to look up Jesus, the divine Helper.

Here, my friends, we find portrayed the intention of our God when He permits us to endure afflictions. They are not to be looked upon as evidences of divine anger. How could God be angry with His dear children who believe in His dear Son?

Neither does God afflict us to make us suffer for our sins. We have no sins to suffer for. Our sins are all forgiven. Jesus did all the suffering for us when He died on the cross for our transgressions. No; God leads us into trials and tribulations, into crosses and afflictions from pure, Fatherly love to keep us from losing the faith.

It would be an impossible thing for us to keep the faith in this world of temptations, if God would not come to our assistance. Very frequently He does that by means of afflictions which touch the tender spot and remove the very cause which endangers our faith.

When God sees that a Christian is in danger of exalting himself, that pride will be his ruin, He burdens his back with a cross that will make him humble and meek.

Even St. Paul had to bear such a cross, as we read in 2 Corinthians 12:7, ***7And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.***

When God sees that a Christian is in danger of losing his faith on account of riches or anything that is near and dear to him in this life, He will sometimes remove these causes, so that they might not bring upon him eternal ruin.

When God sees that a Christian is in danger of dropping off to the world and its evil lusts, He will sometimes afflict him with sickness or with some other ailment that renders this world a vale of tears to him.

Surely many a Christian would lose the faith, had not God given him a sick body as a constant reminder that this world is not to be his everlasting home. Many a person would become ashamed of Christ, did not God keep him in poverty and want. Many a person would never think of seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness, did not misery, and distress, and afflictions of various kinds direct his thoughts heavenward.

Do not murmur because your pleasures maybe only a few in this life, and your days, mostly days of trouble, or because there seems to be no end of woe. It must be so for your own good. The Lord sends affliction that you should not lose the faith.

He desires that you should escape the fate of the rich man who fared sumptuously every day in the world and found himself in hell and torment after death. He desires to lead you through sorrow to eternal joy and happiness. His intention is to keep you from losing the faith.

2. God Permits Us To Endure Afflictions To Strengthen Our Faith

But by sending us afflictions God also intends to strengthen our faith.

The nobleman was a true believer, but his faith was not strong and had many defects. He believed that Christ could heal his dying child if He came along with him and would look at the child and examine him like a physician. It did not occur to him that Jesus could save his son from death if He remained at Cana, while his boy lay ill at Capernaum.

It is for this reason that Jesus says to him, ***“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”*** And when Jesus did not exactly refuse to grant his request by these words, the nobleman implored Him, saying, ***“Sir, come down before my child dies!”***

These words again reveal the defects, the weakness of his faith. He was in effect saying, ***“As long as there is life, there is hope; but when the child is dead, your power is at an end; you can do nothing for me then.”***

He did not believe that Jesus could raise anyone from the dead. And what does Jesus say to him? He does not break the bruised reed, nor does He quench the smoking flax. He says to him, ***“Go your way; your son lives.”*** And now see

the power of Christ's words. In one moment they transform the man. He no longer doubts. He is sure of it that his son is living and well.

Joyfully he proceeds on his journey homeward. ⁵¹ *And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!"* ⁵² *Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him."*

Note well, the boy did not get over the crisis of his sickness during his father's absence and gradually improve, but all of a sudden the disease left him. ⁵³ *So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household.*

He believed, that is, his faith was strengthened and increased to such an extent that he became a bold confessor of his faith in Jesus the Messiah, and all the members of his family were made true believers.

See, my friends, in this way the Lord strengthens our faith. Days of prosperity are not very apt to revive the dying embers of faith. When you possess an abundance of the things that you need for the support of this body and life, then it is an easy thing to say, *"The Lord will provide."*

When you see the means that will help you through times of adversity, then it is an easy thing for you not to despair. When there is no perceptible, imminent danger of death, it is an easy thing to look upon Christ as death's Conqueror. While you feel joy in the heart, it is an easy thing to praise the Lord.

The days of adversity, times of affliction must prove and improve the faith. When nothing is in sight to support you, when it seems as if you must starve, then you must rely on the promises of God that He will not forsake you.

When there is no help, when father and mother, brothers and sisters have forsaken you, then you must look to the Lord alone for help. When death stretches forth his icy hand to seize you, then you must confidently lean upon Christ and with His help conquer the king of terrors.

When you are comfortless and your heart is filled with nothing but cares and anxieties, then you must flee to the Lord and seek comfort for your despairing heart in His life-giving Word.

Such are God's ways with those in whom He strengthens the faith. He allows them to endure afflictions. Do not feel surprised, then, when troubles come. Do not say, *"I am a Christian, a true believer, a child of God; how, then, can God deal with me like this? Why have I deserved this?"*

Such are the thoughts of the children of this world who do not understand God's wonderful dealings with men in the kingdom of His grace. When the children of this world see a Christian getting into great distress, they generally say, *"What good did it do him to pray and to go to church? See his misfortune!"*

They expect that, if there is really a God and gracious Father in heaven, He must reveal His existence by showing kindness to those who trust in Him in such a way as to keep from them all calamities and afflictions and to give them an abundance of earthly goods and pleasures.

But such are not God's ways. The Bible says in Acts 14:21-22, ²¹ ***And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned ...*** ²² ***strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."***

May the Lord grant us all, His grace that we may hold out in the days of affliction, and we will be blessed as was the nobleman in our Gospel. In the furnace of tribulation our faith will be tested and strengthened. And having fought the good fight of faith, and finished the course and kept the faith, we shall receive the crown of righteousness in heaven. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.