

GOOD NEWS FOR THE AFFLICTED



PSALM 46:1

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FOREWARD

The meditations which follow all appeared on the bulletins of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan during the war years of 1941 - 1946. They were prepared by the Pastor of the church, the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema, (1886 - 1965).

They are being published in this Booklet as a testimony of the marvelous grace of God in Jesus Christ which alone is able to sustain God's children in the sufferings and trials of this present life. It should be stated that the titles and texts above each Meditation were chosen by the Evangelism Committee.

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The following summarizes what we believe is the true comfort of the Christian, especially in suffering:

The Heidelberg Catechism, Questions and Answers 1 & 2:

Question 1. What is thy only comfort in life and death?

Answer: That I with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him.

Question 2. How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?

Answer: Three: the first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance.

Romans 14: 7-9: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living."

THE FATHER'S PERFECT WAY

Isaiah 55:8-9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

How little we understand of the mighty work of God, especially as it pertains to our sufferings, sicknesses and sorrows! Yet our God is doing a perfect work. There is no defect, no flaw in what He does. And the perfection of His work will be revealed in the day of Christ, when our salvation shall be fully accomplished and the tabernacle of God shall be with men.

In this perfect work also our troubles, pains, sorrows and griefs occupy their proper place. They fit somehow. They serve His wise purpose and are necessary to fit us into our place in eternal glory. If we could only see how indispensable they were, we would never grumble or feel dissatisfied with our lot. But we cannot see. His work is too great, too high, too deep for us to understand. In detail we cannot understand the reason for our particular way and lot. Should we ask: "Why?" He would but answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee!"

He would have us believe His Word, know that He doeth all things well, and just surrender and follow where He leads. That is trust.

For added comfort, read: Deut. 32:4;
Job 23:10.

GOD'S PURPOSE IN SUFFERING

Hebrews 12: 6, 11, "*For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. 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.*"

There is a great difference between punishment and chastisement, which we do well to bear in mind especially when the Lord leads us in ways of sickness and adversity.

There is, first of all, a difference with respect to the motive and the reason for both. The motive of punishment is God's righteous wrath against sin; the motive of chastisement is His everlasting love. "*For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,*" Hebrews 12:6.

There is a difference, too, with respect to purpose. The purpose of punishment is vindication of justice; the purpose of chastisement is instruction and sanctification: "*For our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness,*" Hebrews 12:10.

And so, finally, there is a difference with respect to the result or end. The end of punishment is eternal death; the end of chastisement is eternal glory. Our God never punishes His children, for Christ bore all our punishment on the cross; but He does chastise them, that they may be exercised thereby (Hebrews 12:11).

Let us understand this by faith, and know that He always loves us.

For added comfort, read: I Peter 1:6-7.

THE LOVE OF GOD IS GREATER FAR

Psalm 119:75, I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."

In the midst of the suffering of this present time, and also when the time is there that we are "old and grayheaded," it is a glorious truth to know and a blessed promise to lay hold of, that nothing can separate us from the love of God: "*neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Romans 8:38-39.

This means that this love of God revealed in the cross of our Lord, is always near, is always touching us. Nothing can come between that love of God and us. Even in all the adversities and sufferings and sorrows and pains of this present time, it is the love of God that is dealing with us. In His love He employs these evils for our good. His love sends them to us, preserves us in the midst of them, sanctifies us through them, glorifies us in the way of them.

We cannot see this, but we believe and lay hold on this blessed truth by His grace. And if the ever-nearness of this love of God to us in all things may be our experience, we have peace, and begin to understand that it is possible to glory even in tribulation.

For added comfort, read, Romans 5:1-5.

THE CHRISTIAN'S ANSWER

Romans 8:1, *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."*

Does God punish us for our sins? Is our sickness, perhaps to be considered a punishment for our sins?

This anxious query often arises in our minds and hearts when God leads us in ways of suffering and sorrow. Satan and our sinful flesh often use our troubles to tempt us, and to persuade us to think that in our sickness, God simply metes out to us what we deserve. Sometimes, perhaps, we imagine that we can see a connection between our particular illness and our personal sins, and we conclude that God punishes us. And then we are afraid and have no peace and comfort.

We should, therefore, clearly understand that even though God chastises us in His love and for our profit, He never punishes His children for their sins. Christ bore all our punishment, forever. God does not punish sin twice.

Our eye of faith, therefore, should constantly be fixed on His cross and resurrection. Then we will have redemption, the forgiveness of sin. And when the devil comes to tempt us, we will have something to answer him.

For added comfort, read: Romans 5:1;
Proverbs 3:11-12

THE GLORIOUS WAYS OF GOD

II Corinthians 4:11, 14, *"For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you."*

"We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen."

(II Corinthians 4:18). How blessed to have grace to do this!

There is no hope, no consolation in the things that are seen, the things we experience in this present world. They all remind us that we lie in the midst of death, and that *"this life is nothing but a continual death."*

But how different all these things become if we regard the things that are not seen, the things eternal! Then we look at the fact of Jesus, our Lord, in whose cross and resurrection we behold God's way out of death into the glory of eternal life! And then all our present suffering and death are but ways of God unto that exceeding and eternal *weight of glory!*" Then *"we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."* (II Corinthians 4:16).

For added comfort, read: II Corinthians 5:1-8.

CONTENTMENT IN THE LORD'S WAY

Psalm 73:23-24, *"Nevertheless, I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."*

How blessed is the man that may take this confession upon his lips, and so trust in the God of his salvation! What a glad confession it is! It covers all, life and death, time and eternity. For if we trust that Jehovah guides us with His counsel, we do so in the joyous assurance that His counsel is a counsel of salvation for us. He then leads us that the way must lead to glory.

The way then may be dark and dreary, steep and almost impassable, a way of suffering and affliction. And we may not understand the way of the Lord. Nor do we have to understand. We know that both the way and the end are determined by the same love which He revealed in the death of His only begotten Son. And we trust, simply trust, following where He leads; asking no question; knowing that all things work together for our good.

His counsel is a counsel of love, of perfect wisdom, of never failing power. All is well!

For added comfort, read:

Philippians 4:6-7.

THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE

Romans 8:24-25, *"For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."*

It is for things we see not, that we hope. The scope of things hoped for by the world is limited to things that are seen. Why hope for them? They are not worthy of our hope. They perish. But God has prepared for them that love Him things *"which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man"* I Corinthians 2:9. If we hope for them, we wait patiently for them, that is, we are willing and able to suffer for a while, if need be, with a view to these unseen things. And well may we wait with patience, nor shall our patience ever be put to shame. For the things we hope for are sure as the promises of God. They shall surely be revealed in due time. And they are worth waiting for, and suffering for, if necessary. For they are unspeakably precious and glorious.

A little patience, a little suffering, and eternal glory is ours.

For added comfort, read: Hebrews 10:36; Romans 5:2-5.

DAY BY DAY OUR SAVIOR LEADS

Matthew 6:34, *Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."*

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow!"
Thus the Savior exhorts us in Matthew 6:34.

And this exhortation is always applicable to us, but we need it especially in times of adversity, suffering and sorrow. How inclined we are, when the way is dark today to look forward to the morrow in anxiety of heart and mind! What will the morning bring? Will the way be still darker? Will it bring new sorrow? And thus we often try to bear today that which we, perhaps, will never have to bear. How good it is that the morrow is hid from our view. Let us not anxiously stare at the veil that hides it from our eyes. We need not be anxious. Father knows! He lives today and tomorrow. He controls all the day. And He careth for you! Let each day, then, be sufficient unto the evil thereof (Matthew 6:24), and let us commit the morrow to Him who loves us in Christ Jesus.

He will bring it to pass!

For added comfort, read:

Philippians 4: 6-7.

WHERE HE LEADS, I WILL FOLLOW

Psalm 55:22, *"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."*

How often the Word of God exhorts us in various forms to commit our way unto the Lord, to cast our burdens upon Him, and not to be anxious about our earthly way?

To commit our way unto the Lord means that we humbly follow where He leads, without asking questions, confident that His way with us is one of wisdom and everlasting love in Christ Jesus our Lord, trusting that He will bring it to pass. For the flesh this is impossible. If we could determine our own way through this world, we would always carefully avoid a way of adversity and gloom, of sorrow, and sickness.

Yet, the Lord often leads His children in ways of darkness and distress. And then we need grace to commit our way to Him. And this is a daily exercise, for which we need grace constantly, to be received in the way of prayer. And how blessed it is to have this grace! For according as we do commit our way to our God, we are free from anxiety, and rejoice in the Lord. And that joy nothing can take away from us.

It is abiding!

For added comfort, read: Psalm 37:5; Philippians 4:6-7.

LOOKING AT THINGS UNSEEN

II Corinthians 4:17-18, *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."*

In II Corinthians 4:17, the apostle Paul speaks of his and all our suffering as a light affliction. Surely, the Word of God does not mean that our sufferings and afflictions are light in themselves. The apostle could himself enumerate a long list of sufferings which he had endured as a servant of Jesus Christ. And what a pain and agony, what a sorrow and grief, what a fear and anxiety, what affliction of body and soul are implied in the sufferings of this present time!

But the apostle explains this evaluation of our sufferings when he continues to say that we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen. There is no comfort in the things that are seen! How could there be, seeing we lie in the midst of death?

But the things which are not seen are exceedingly glorious and eternal. Compared with them our present sufferings are both light and only for a moment!

May we have grace to look at those unseen and eternal things!

For added comfort, read: Romans 8:18.

AFFLICTED? WHY ME?

I Peter 1:6-7: *"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."*

Although we cannot often find an answer to the why of our searching heart and mind with respect to the details of our way, the Word of God gives us general answers for our comfort and instruction.

One of these is, that our suffering always assumes the character of a trial. And that means that God casts us in the crucible of affliction, first, in order that the beauty of His work of grace in us may become manifest.

Secondly, that our faith may be enriched and strengthened through suffering.

Thirdly, that thus we may become prepared for our own particular place in glory.

And all the while He never leaves us, but is with us in the crucible, to sustain and keep us, that we may never perish!

For added comfort, read: Isaiah 43:2;

Job 23:10.

MEETING THE LORD IN AFFLICTION

Psalm 119:71, *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."*

It is not so much *what* we bear but *how* we bear what God lays upon us in this life.

Each has his own burden to bear and to each God gives the grace that is necessary to bear it when we look to Him for help. And through looking to Him and imploring His grace, God brings us into closer fellowship with Him. Thus, through the burdens of this life God prepares for us a blessing.

It is so often exactly in a way that we would never choose, that we meet the Lord and taste that He is good. And then we can say with the psalmist of Psalm 119:71, *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes."*

What marvelous grace that causes affliction to be for our profit!

For added comfort, read: Psalm 119:75.

ALL THINGS WORK FOR OUR GOOD

Psalm 84:11, *"For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly."*

The Lord is a sun: He is the Source of all light and life. to live apart from Him is death, but His fellowship is life for us. And the Lord is a shield: He protects and preserves His people from all the powers of evil that seek their destruction. He does not in this life, remove all evil and affliction from them, but He gives them grace which is sufficient unto every need. He makes us taste His goodness even in the way of adversity and makes that way subservient to our glory. Never does He withhold any good thing from those that walk in His way.

God gives us always a full measure of good things. All that God gives us is good. The fact that we are not always able to see that does not alter the case. By faith we embrace this promise and are assured that He makes all things work together for our salvation.

Therefore, when we walk uprightly, no matter what the way of life may be, we are comforted in the knowledge that God is realizing our salvation.

For added comfort, read: Romans 8:28.

PATIENT TRUST IN GOD

Psalm 62:1-2, *"Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved."*

The psalmist sings: *"Truly my soul waiteth upon God"* Psalm 62:1. Our *Psalter* renders the original quite properly: *"My soul in silence waits for God."*

A soul in silence, or a silent soul! What a blessed gift of grace!

A silent soul is the opposite of a turbulent, restless, impatient, rebellious soul. It is a soul that is resting in God. If our soul is silent toward God, we do not judge His ways with us, do not murmur, speak not against Him, are of a tranquil mind, free from fear and anxiety, have peace with God and with His ways.

How blessed to be able to say this in times of trouble and suffering! To enjoy this blessing we must wait upon Him, trust in Him, follow where He leads, confident that our salvation shall surely come from Him, and humbly commit the way to Him.

They that wait for the Lord shall never be ashamed!

For added comfort, read Isaiah 26:3-4.

HE DOETH ALL THINGS WELL!

Psalm 37:5, *"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass."*

Especially when we are sick and in distress it is well for us to hear and heed the Word of God: *"Commit thy way unto the Lord"* Psalm 37:5.

Our way includes all our experiences as they are sent us by the Lord. As to this way, we cannot see it ahead: we know not what the morrow will bring. Hence, we are inclined to be anxious. Moreover, it is often a way of distress and suffering, for this life is nothing but a continual death; hence, we often lament, and are inclined to murmur. Then, too, we do not understand the ways of God. They often seem foolish to us. He takes away a mother from her children, and a father from his family that depend on him for their livelihood.

Commit it all unto the Lord. Leave it to Him. Trust that He doeth all things well, though you cannot see it; and humbly follow where He leads, without murmuring. Then you will have the peace that passeth all understanding. And He will surely bring it to pass, lead you, give you grace to walk in the way, and save you in the end!

For added comfort, read:

Philippians 4:6-7.

RACE
(Hebrews 12)

A cloud of witnesses surrounds:
Those who have run;
Those who by faith have won
The victors' crowns.

Now you must run His course.
Lift up your feeble hands,
Your strengthless knees.
Before you stands
The Savior, your faith's Source.
Author and Finisher He is;
Look unto Him your spent strength to renew.
He gives the eagles' wings to you.
You shall not weary grow - the race is His.

Already He the victory has won.
His life He has laid down
To gain for you a crown.
Rise up with joy and run!
Throw off the weight that would delay.
Lay at the foot of Calvary's tree
The sin that would a hindrance be.
Go on your way!

The laurel wreath awaits him that endures
And Jesus Christ your victory assures.
His chastening hand supplies
Your healing exercise.
You shall not faint but thrive,
So for the finish strive.
You are His chosen one,
So run!

-- *Suzanne Looyenga*

*(Mrs. Looyenga is a former member of the
Protestant Reformed Church of South
Holland, Illinois.)*

DESIRE FOR REST

O God, give Thou ear to my plea,
And hide not Thyself from my cry;
O hearken and answer Thou me,
As restless and weary I sigh.
Nay, soul, call on God all the day;
The Lord for thy help will appear;
At eve, morn, and noon humbly pray,
And He thy petition will hear.
Thy burden now cast on the Lord,
And He shall thy weakness sustain;
The righteous who trust in His word
Unmoved shall forever remain.

(from *The Psalter* -- a versification of
Psalm 55)

GOD OUR DELIVERER

Let God be praised with reverence deep;
He daily comes our lives to steep
In bounties freely given.
God cares for us, our God is He;
Who would not fear His majesty
In earth as well as heaven?
Our God upholds us in the strife;
To us He grants eternal life,
And saves from desolation.
He hears the needy when they cry,
He saves their souls when death draws nigh,
This God is our salvation.

(from *The Psalter* -- a versification of
Psalm 68)

LIFE WITH GOD

In sweet communion, Lord, with Thee
I constantly abide;
My hand Thou holdest in Thy own
To keep me near Thy side.
Thy counsel through my earthly way
Shall guide me and control,
And then to glory afterward
Thou wilt receive my soul.
Whom have I, Lord, in heav'n but Thee,
To whom my thoughts aspire?
And, having Thee, on earth is nought
That I can yet desire.
Tho' flesh and heart should faith and fail,
The Lord will ever be
The strength and portion of my heart,
My God eternally.
To live apart from God is death,
'Tis good His face to seek;
My refuge is the living God,
His praise I long to speak.

(from *The Psalter* -- a versification of
Psalm 73)

THE FATHERLY LOVE OF GOD

The tender love a father has
For all his children dear,
Such love the Lord bestows on them
Who worship Him in fear.
The Lord remembers we are dust,
And all our frailty knows;
Man's days are like the tender grass,
And as the flower he grows.
The flower is withered by the wind
That smites with blighting breath;
So man is quickly swept away
Before the blast of death.
Unchanging is the love of God,
From age to age the same,
Displayed to all who do His will
And reverence His name.
Those who His gracious covenant keep
The Lord will ever bless;
Their children's children shall rejoice
To see His righteousness.

(from *The Psalter* -- a versification of
Psalm 103)

SATISFACTION IN GOD

The lovingkindness of my God
Is more than life to me;
So I will bless Thee while I live
And lift my prayer to Thee.
In Thee my soul is satisfied,
My darkness turns to light,
And joyful meditations fill
The watches of the night.
My Savior, 'neath Thy shelt'ring wings
My soul delights to dwell;
Still closer to Thy side I press,
for near Thee all is well.
My soul shall conquer every foe,
Upholden by Thy hand;
Thy people shall rejoice in God,
Thy saints in glory stand.

(from *The Psalter* -- a versification of
Psalm 63)

OUR LIGHT AFFLICTION
ETERNAL WEIGHT

WORKS FOR US AN
OF GLORY. II COR. 4:17

**GOOD NEWS
FOR THE
AFFLICTED**

JESUS CHRIST THE SAME

YESTERDAY, AND TODAY, AND FOREVER

HEB. 13:8