

STRAIGHTWAY

"And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him" [Mark 1:18].

CHRISTIAN PURITIES FELLOWSHIP

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OBSERVERS OF SUFFERERS

by Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, Founder & President
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The Holy Spirit and suffering are joined together in our viewing the Work of Jesus Christ, in His sufferings, on the Cross of Calvary. If man is to ever understand aright the necessity and meaning of suffering he must view it through the Cross. Man, in life as a sinner; and man, in life as a Christian are confounded by the subject although each from a different perspective of life itself.

In looking back across the spectrum of history, it is obvious that we, in our generation, know more about our temptations, our sins, the natural man, the spiritual man, the Serpent, and the Devil than we do about Christ's sufferings or our own. The only answer the Charismatics have for suffering is healing.

Many of us would even object to being too long in a hospital, either as a patient or a visitor. We are not people who are really acquainted with sorrows, sufferings, and griefs. We simply try to avoid all such roads to these conditions, and immediately

long for deliverance when and if we ever enter into them.

Job in Uz; Ezekiel in Babylon

As we introduce this subject we need to view two passages in the Bible where men sat in silence for seven days before appraising or responding to the suffering of another. This first scene is viewed at the time of the intense suffering of Job. His three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, had proposed to come to "mourn with him and to comfort him" (2:11b). When they saw Job afar off, they could not recognize him because of the extreme change in his appearance through his sufferings. Then, they sat down with Job upon the ground "seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great" (2:13). Even the younger man, Elihu, who appears at the end of the Book, had been watching the debate of argument, evidently, for days. He,

too, was an observer.

The scene now changes to the days of the Babylonian Captivity when Ezekiel was called of the Lord to “get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear” (3:11). So with the will of God in his spirit, Ezekiel went, by the Spirit of God, with the voice of God accompanying, saying, “Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place” (3:12). Ezekiel’s first view of the suffering captives is quite impressive: “Then I came to them at the captivity of Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained their astonished among them seven days” (3:15).

Three Ways to Study Suffering

These two scenes of a seven-day wake before sufferers are quite different in the outcome of each situation. We understand these days as of particular importance to reveal how the observers of sufferers will react and either give appropriate response to the sufferers or not. In reality, we can only know suffering as we ought

to by three observations: first, the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ; second, studying the sufferings of other people; and third, observations of our own self in our sufferings of life. In these passages in the Bible, mentioned above, it is clear that Job’s friends and Ezekiel will primarily be the observers of **other** sufferers. At least, this is the way the scenes begin. However, Ezekiel will then join the sufferers after he has observed them. In the case of Job’s friends, Job will have to pray for them at the end because of their false conclusions about his sufferings.

Anyone who is observing a sufferer either concludes the matter from the standpoint of his own subjectivity, or, the standpoint of the objectivity of the sufferer. These seven days will determine the heart-condition of the observer, and from that point on conclusions are drawn, words will be said, and the reputation of the sufferer will be at the hands of the observer, whether right or wrong. Everyone of us, without an exception, if and when we are the observer of a sufferer, will conclude the matter as we see it, and then express that conclusion, subjectively or objectively, right or wrong. In most sufferings of sufferers, the aftermath is filled with what the observers thought during the suffering rather than the testimony of the sufferer alone. Of course, if the sufferer never returns from his sufferings, his testimony will actually never be known. But if the sufferer returns from his sufferings with a greater understanding of God, he or she usually has something worthy and noble to say.

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Job's Friends

In the case of Job's friends, after their seven days of observation, they will then step forward and project their appraisal of the sufferings of Job. Three speeches will come from Eliphaz, three speeches from Bildad; and, two speeches from Zophar. Later on, a younger observer, Elihu, who was also an observer of the three previous men and Job will speak. He will give four speeches. From all twelve speeches given by Job's friends and Elihu, we see that they have appraised Job, subjectively, through their own philosophies, feelings, emotions, and knowledge. We do not believe what they said was untrue. Rather, their conclusions did not apply to the sufferings of Job. They are against the sufferer, Job. Elihu is more cordial to Job, but still persists in his thinking against Job. He gives restatements of the subjective thinking of Job's three friends; he gives some misstatements of Job; he includes subjects of dreams and sufferings. He seems to be moved to step in with his observations simply because the three friends of Job were not able to convince Job of their subjective views, and so, Elihu seeks to give a convincing argument against the viewpoint of suffering for the sufferer, Job.

The Captives' Friend

In the case of Ezekiel, he arrives at the scene, led by God, and his heart is already prepared to view, objectively, the captives in Babylon. The Holy Spirit led Ezekiel to view the captives. This is certainly an advantage of any observer of those who suffer; be genuinely led of the Holy Spirit to even go and visit them, so that the visit will be to gain the truth of the

sufferer from the spiritual evidence of the sufferer. In the final analysis, Ezekiel was prepared, led, and arrived with the proper message from the Lord to fit the objective need of the sufferers. Ezekiel was responsible for warning each of four kinds of people which he observed among the captives, and mentioned clearly in the passage (3:18-21). They were: the wicked who turn not from wickedness but is not warned to be saved, the prophet will be responsible; the wicked who turn not from his wickedness but is warned, the prophet will not be responsible; the righteous man who is not warned, and turns to sin, the prophet will be responsible; and, the righteous man who is warned to sin not, and does sin, the prophet will not be responsible. Just as the task of a watchman was to warn the city against impending danger, so Ezekiel was to warn his people of the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Although the task of Ezekiel was personal, of his own people, viewing both their sins and the godly remnant, he observed accurately and spiritually, and therefore did set forth an objective and honorable response to them all. You will notice, with great clarity, that in all of Ezekiel's warnings there is the vision of the glory of God in the good providence of God following the people to the very end of the prophecy. Ezekiel joins his sufferers. But it was a day when the watchman must warn all!

Sufferer and Observer

Why have we presented these extended scenes of these two passages in the Bible? To reveal that the observers of a sufferer have a grave responsibility to accurately appraise

the sufferer in the light of the truth about that sufferer. Too many times, both sinners and Christians go to visit a sufferer, and carry away a conclusion of the sufferer that is simply the subjective conclusions of the observer's pride, selfishness, and evil surmising of the sufferer, which might not be true at all. This is a very important truth for all of us: we are as much a part of the sufferer as the sufferer; our observation of the sufferer will be brought out in the record of what we observed one day at either the Great White Throne Judgment, if a sinner; or at the Bema Judgment, if we are a Christian. The Bible speaks of giving a cup of cold water in the name of Jesus; visiting the afflicted; offending a child; or binding up the wounds of the wounded man on the Jericho Road. I wonder how many times have I, myself, observed the sufferer with a wrong spirit, resulting in the wrong gossip poured out after leaving the sufferer. This is a sin against the Body of Christ; it grieves the Holy Spirit and offends the Lord. But presently, we are all blessed greatly being under the mercy of God in all things.

His Mercy Endureth Forever

Even the Bible speaks of God's mercy as enduring forever, and that is our native request of God, to give mercy, and of all other powers, both as a sinner and a Christian. There are three Hallel Psalms in the Psalter, 113, 118, and 136. The first is called "The Lesser Hallel;" the second, "The Middle Hallel;" and the third, "The Great Hallel." Psalms 113-118 are known as the Egyptian Hallel, the meaning of the word is "Praise." This Egyptian Hallel of six Psalms are

sung in connection with the Passover, the first two before the meal and the remaining four afterwards. Of course, the Passover is directly related to Israel's deliverance from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. All of these Psalms, including particularly Psalm 136, magnifies the phrase so highly, "for his mercy endureth forever."

In the 26 verses of "The Great Hallel" (Psalm 136), if we subtract verses one through three and verse 26, which are distinctly different, we would see the twenty-two remaining verses to be reminded of the twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet. They are initiated similarly, while the other four verses share the consistency of their own openings, "O give thanks." Two of these "thanks" are directed to the Lord, and two to God. The remaining 22 verses speak of God's "mercy" from A to Z (or, Aleph to Tav; Hebrew) in the life and history of Israel. And from A to Z, in all our lives, we may see, if we do see, that more than any attribute of God, His "mercy" does truly endure forever for us.

I want to go on record that "mercy" has marked my life; my cup and my saucer have both run over with God's main promise and declaration of His mercy upon me. No doubt, because of "goodness and mercy" following us all the days of our lives, we view suffering as the rare event, the exception to the rule, and do not see it as we should. We do not recognize that God's mercy includes mercy in our sufferings. And there are some Christian people around the world who have been sufferers all their lives, and found mercy from God in all their sufferings.

Luther's Theology of the Cross

One of the reasons why I appreciate Martin Luther above the other reformers of Calvin, Melancthon, Zwingli, the Puritan Fathers, and other Reform identities lies in the fact of his emphasis, his central core of truth. In his writings and actions of 1517, Luther did set forth "Justification by Faith" as his theme, with faith alone (*sola*) being man's response to his Justification and Righteousness before God. He had previously always read in the Bible of "the righteousness of God" as a thing to fear, and he did almost take war with Moses and God because of the Law and God's righteousness against man. However, Luther finally saw that there was also "the righteousness of God" as "revealed" through Jesus Christ, which righteousness was a robe to wear in the presence of God, and that God, the Father, would view man in His Son's righteousness and extend grace for the sinner. He saw this for the first time in Romans (1:17); and he saw it by faith. A good definition of faith lies in the wonder of man lifting up empty hands to receive the unspeakable gift of the righteousness of Christ which reconciles the believing sinner with God the Father.

But out of this glorious fact of redemption, Martin Luther saw it all in the Cross of Jesus, in the theology of the Cross. He thought of the Cross as the very core of all biblical truth. It was the Gospel. In the year of 1518, at Heidelberg, the year after his Ninety-Five Theses which he nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral, October 31, 1517, that Luther presented his Theology of the Cross. His sermons at Heidelberg did present

this core-truth of the Theology of the Cross. Luther came to understand and appreciate this Theology of the Cross with an unprecedented emphasis; it appears to this writer, above the other reformers.

It is with this key, I believe, we must finally learn to understand all the sufferings of life.

There is certainly the emphasis in our Faith concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation and Virgin Birth of the Lord Jesus; the Body the Holy Spirit prepared for Jesus in the womb of Mary; that He was made like us and yet not like us; the Holy Spirit in the Gift of the Holy Scriptures; and the Holy Spirit in the Resurrected, Glorified Christ. Yet, these wonders must give way to the awesome Passion of the Christ on the Cross. It is very clear, Jesus was offered through and by the Holy Spirit. Or, more accurately, Jesus Christ offered Himself through the Eternal Holy Spirit. Deeper than all descriptions of His physical sufferings on the Cross, and they were great; deeper than all His agonies involved; His passion was made effectual to our redemption by His love and voluntary obedience. These things are generally called His passive and active satisfaction. By the first we understand His actual bearing pain, anguish, and death; by the second, His zeal for the honor of God, the faithfulness, the love, and the divine pity by which He became obedient unto death; yea, the unique death of the Cross.

"The Hidden God"

Luther also spoke and wrote of the "Hidden God" as a riddle whose solution defines the distinctively Christian understanding of both man

and God. He reasoned: If God is indeed in the Cross, then He is a God whose presence is hidden from us. Luther observed, citing Isaiah 45:15, "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." And yet, to Luther, the unfolding of that hidden presence of God in the scene of dereliction upon the Cross holds the key to Luther's protracted search for a gracious God. To him, no one would dream of seeking God in the "disgrace, poverty, death and everything else that is shown to us in the suffering Christ." Nevertheless, God is there, hidden and yet revealed for those who care to seek Him.

The Hiding of God in the Cross

These words best express my own heart in the matter of the Holy Spirit and sufferings. Much truth is found hidden in the Cross; nevertheless, God is there, hidden and yet revealed for those who care to seek Him. It is wonderful to know that we do not have to understand these things to enjoy God's redemptive work of grace to the salvation of our souls. However, if we are indeed going to speak of suffering, as with any hope of understanding it in our own lives, it is good to know that there is also hidden, in the Cross, besides its redemption power, an insight for not only our acceptance of suffering, but also the possibility of finding out something about the experience of suffering in order that we might truly serve the Lord through our suffering experience as well as possibly lead someone else to go through suffering with a better thought of God, self, and others.

There is no doubt in my own

mind, at this juncture in my own life, that there is far more to realize that is good and holy from sufferings, if and when it comes, as than being overtaken into the slough of despair and defeat by the suffering itself. But unless the observer of a sufferer views the sufferer aright, the testimony probably will not triumph as it should.

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A TREATISE ON REVIVAL (PART TWO)

by Dr. H.T. Spence, Vice President
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The month of July brings us to a cyclical reminder of the birth of our nation in 1776. Historians from a variety of philosophical backgrounds have written volumes of publications presenting their views of what influenced or provoked the birth of this beloved country. Certainly a number of views of history have proven to be true, and yet there are other views (increasingly so) which are inaccurate and simply become an outlet to the prejudicial mind and heart of the writer. But there is one influence upon the birth of our nation that stands above them all and cannot be contradicted: The direct influence of “God” and His workings of revivals and awakenings during the time of our birth.

The First Great Awakening (1740-45) proved to be of great influence as the Protestant Reformation did in many areas in the sixteenth century. In America providence used this movement of God to form a national consciousness among people of different colonies whose primary ties were with Europe rather than with one another. It definitely reinforced the strong conviction among many in the colonies that God had a special destiny in store for America; it also developed a sense of cohesiveness among the people. Time and a tonnage of written disinformation has erased the fact that Whitefield, Tennent, and Edwards were rallying names for Americans thirty years before Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, and Samuel Adams became the familiar household

names. These former men, through their preaching, strongly affected the colonies in those early years: such as the moral character of America; the rejuvenation of higher education and the founding of colleges; the birth of the missionary spirit, especially to the Indians; the heightening of the roles of both the clergy and laity which had fallen into an ill-favored reputation. It brought about a call to the colonies for a greater need of dignity and respect for life and the proper, biblical concern for society. (This latter observation has become distorted and misunderstood today: The Revivalists and Awakeners did NOT see themselves as reformers of society structure. Most were silent on the social ills, concentrating their efforts on spiritual conditions of men. Finney did much for the cause of abolition but did not view himself as a reformer in it. George Whitefield, 1740-1790, accepted slavery and did not preach or work against it, although he did strongly attack the cruelty of some slave owners as “masters of barbarity.”)

But it must be kept in mind that revivals and awakenings in national history were periodic restoration of God’s people after a time of great indifference and decline. This principle is firmly taught in the Word of God as we see leading up to the revivals in the days of Asa, Jehoash, Hezekiah, Josiah, Zerubbabel, Nehemiah and others. Revivals or awakenings do bring advancements to a nation; but, as Solomon Stoddard

stated, there are declines which follow the awakening, and much of the decline is the result of excesses that appeared from enthusiasts led by their own self-conceit and authority. Jonathan Edwards stated during the First Great Awakening:

If we look back into the history of the Church of God in past ages, we may observe that it has been a common device of the Devil, to overset a revival of religion, when he finds he can keep men quiet and secure no longer, then to drive them into excesses and extravagances. He holds them back as long as he can: but when he can do it no longer, then he will push them on, and if possible, run them upon their heads. And it has been chiefly that he has been successful in several instances to overthrow most hopeful and promising beginnings: Yea, the principle means by which the Devil was successful, by degrees, to overset that great religious revival of the world, that was in the primitive ages of Christianity: and in a manner to overthrow the Christian church through the earth, and to make way for, and bring on the grand anti-Christian apostasy, that masterpiece of all the Devil's work, was to improve the indiscreet zeal of Christians, to drive them into those three extremes of Enthusiasm, Superstition, and Severity towards opposers, which should be enough for an everlasting warning to the

Christian Church. And though the Devil will do his diligence to stir up the open enemies of religion, yet he knows what is his interest so well, that in a time of revival of religion, his main strength shall be tried with the friends of it, and he will chiefly exert himself in his attempts upon them to mislead them. One truly zealous person, in the time of such an event, that seems to have a great hand in the affair, and draws the eye of many upon him, may do more (through Satan's being too subtle for him) to hinder the work than a hundred great, and strong, and open opposers.

History seems to prove similar patterns that emerge in the coming of great awakenings to a nation, community, or church. The first of these patterns: revival is usually preceded by a time of spiritual depression, apathy, and gross sin, in which the great majority of nominal Christians are hardly different in their lifestyles from members of secular society.

Another pattern which emerges is that when this happens an individual or small group of God's people become conscious of their sins and backslidden condition, and vows to forsake all that is displeasing to God. Such people recall past outpourings of God's grace and power, and long for such in their own lives for godly living. When the histories of revivals have been written later, it was discovered that individuals at great distances and completely unknown to each other had, prior to the awakening, been praying simultaneously to

the same end. (A note of interest: twenty-one families entered into a covenant of prayer in Germany in 1383 to pray every day for God to visit their country with a spiritual awakening. The last of these families concluded this one hundred year prayer chain in 1483, the year Martin Luther was born.)

A third pattern which surfaces is found in the fact that when a time comes that a few Christians begin to yearn for a manifestation of God's power in their lives, one or more leaders arise in God's providence with prophetic insights into the causes and remedies of the problems. When such leaders arise to speak they proclaim the standard of biblical holiness that exposes the ungodliness of the age, and call God's people to a quest for God's holiness in their lives.

A fourth emerging pattern is that when the previous patterns occur the awakening of Christians occur; and this awakening is to an understanding and an appropriation of a deeper, spiritual life.

But it must be fully acknowledged, in the study of revivals and awakenings, that the evangelizing of the unsaved may or MAY NOT be concurrent with this awakening of the Christians. Carefully note the history of the Protestant Reformation: the bringing of salvation to those outside the church was NOT a paramount issue, but it was the dissemination of Scriptural doctrine. The prominent "Neo" leaders of our day, including the interpretation of "revival" by a number of Fundamentalists, make the terms "revivalism" and "evangelism" synonymous, which is NOT true. Yes, perhaps unsaved people may come to accept Christ in a genuine

move of God's Spirit. But if a society has been "cluttered" with the Gospel of Christianity for a long period of time (though perverted as it may be), evangelism may not be the central thrust of God's revival workings. If one would study the Welsh Revival in 1902-05, most of the people of Wales considered themselves regenerated. "Revival" or an "Awakening" is primarily for God's people. although there may be conversions of those who do not identify themselves with Christ.

But a final observation in history seems to indicate that an awakening or revival is God's way to prepare and strengthen His people for imminent or future challenges, sufferings, or severe trials. History has proven this time and time again as such awakenings were often antecedent to persecutions and severe tests as yet unseen, that were to come and winnow God's people.

America, in spite of its claim of the "Christian Religion" is in the worst condition of its history. Christian Liberalism, Neo-Evangelicalism, and the Charismatics surface in the media with equal, professional productions and capital as the secular, mega media. Yes, they even cry aloud that today's religion is the Fourth Great Awakening in America. The public, American Christianity (especially the conservative Neo-Evangelicals) acknowledge national sins, degeneration of society, the failures of home and government, but our country is void among the public preachers of a prophet's voice for true awakening to God and biblical righteousness. We are simply in an awakening to "religion."

The deep perversion of Christianity

among its popular spokespersons across our country today has woven itself in a permanent fashion with whatever true Gospel is known by the public. Because of this, though I pray for my country regularly, I see no hope of a national revival or awakening in America. I respect anyone who is looking to God for such a revival, but there is a point where the wound of a nation is incurable (Micah 1:9a). But I do see the hope of revival for a local church or family. Though debauchery and sin were rampant in days of the First Awakening, there was still a sanity of thinking concerning "God" which is no longer in our society. For

America has become the religious melting-pot of the world; even the old Eastern Religions have been Americanized and eclectically merged with Christianity. The public understanding of the genuine God of heaven is no longer evident. Perhaps it is irretrievably lost until the Lord returns to set up His Kingdom.

The local churches and homes desperately need a voice to arise and given a biblical treatise on revival, so that God's people will see the cost of a personal revival or awakening. Otherwise, the term will fall into a sham and become another collectible piece in the conquest of the Neo's.

THE FALL SEMESTER BEGINS

August 22, 1996

8:00 AM Faculty-Staff Meeting

August 23, 1996

8:00 AM Worship Service, Orientation
& Registration; Academy
Classes Begin

August 27, 1996

8:00 AM College Student Orientation

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