

to Take It?"

"We triumph even in our trouble, knowing that trouble produces endurance and endurance produces character." Romans 5:3

Out of the past comes the story of a Great sultan who had his grand scribe compile a history of the human race. With long toil the task was accomplished, and the scribes went to the sultan with one hundred donkeys loaded with five hundred volumes of historic lore. When the sultan saw such a mountainous mass of material he was displeased and wanted his history cut down to readable proportions. "Abridge! Abridge!" Commanded the angry potentate. "Sire," answered the historian, "All these volumes may be compressed into a single sentence: "They were born; they suffered; they died."

Without exaggerating the existence of the story, everyone knows the truth of the historian's comment. It is not true because Job said it, but Job said it because it is true: "Man is born into trouble as the sparks fly upward." Every son of Adam meets with enough pain and misfortune and moral anguish to assure him that life is not a bottle of perfume by a long sea mile. The school of experience has its own colors, and they are black and white and blue. As soon as you matriculate in the university of life you discover that one of the required courses is called troubles.

In view of what has been said thus far, the part of wisdom is not to play the ostrich and refuse to see the fact; it is rather to accept it and see what can be done about it. Of all the lessons we must learn, the one which means most to our personal well-being is this: how to deal with unwelcome experiences which are part of the fact of life. So we go back to our Christian faith to learn what it says about being able to take it.

I. Many people who are having trouble with life begin by putting their problem in the form of the question, Why? Here, for example, is a letter one man wrote to his friend. He said that he was seventy-four years of age and he listed five catastrophes which had befallen members of his family, and then he said: "My question about life can be summed up in this one word: Why?"

That is the approach which most of us make toward misfortune, and it is not difficult to understand the reason. We start out with the idea that religion answers everything. We were taught to think of it first of all as a set of theoretical propositions intended to clear up the mystery of life, to make it possible to answer the ultimate problems, and to enable us to say,

"Now, I understand why!" When we were children and could be content with simple answers, religion was presented as the answer to our question, "Why? Why was there ever anything at all? Why did God make the world? Why are we here? Why do we suffer? Why die? For every question that was raised, religious faith was given as the answer and the idea sank in: religion is a way of explaining everything.

Now, however, the years have passed and every year the mystery of life grows more profound. We have seen such tragedy as we never dreamed existed during our younger years. We constantly happens upon the rankest injustice; lives blasted; persons whom we think deserve happiness, are all but happy. In the innocent years of childhood God was in his heaven and all was right with the world; but now it has become plain that life is far from being a musical drama. There are times when the whole business of living seems out of joint and Christian faith fails to answer our questions.

We can all sympathize with those who are living in the land of why. We have been residents there ourselves. We know you are dealing with the ultimate problem, of human thought. It is called the problem of suffering and it is stated like this: Why, if God is good and powerful, does he permit good people to suffer and bad people to prosper? It is called an ultimate problem because no one, from Job on down, has ever been able to find a full answer. I know too that while resentment against providence is natural, as long as you make no other approach to your trouble you will remain at a stand still. You will get nowhere. You will have to learn to adopt a method which is at once more intelligent and more courageous and more Christian.

II. What is that method? It is to see that you are following the wrong cue in putting your problem in the form of the question Why? It is to see that the Christian faith nowhere promises to clear up all mysteries. It is to accept the fact, as Paul puts it, that "at present we only see the baffling reflections in a mirror"; and it is to remember that our Lord himself was faced with the same question. There are times with some of us that the most comforting passage in the whole of the Bible is the cry of Jesus from the cross: "My God, My God..." He never said, "I have explained the universe." What he said in effect was, "I have overcome it, risen above it, won a spiritual victory in face of it." If you are a Christian in the sense that you will let him call the signals you will see that the big question is no longer Why?, but How? The method, in brief, is to move out of the land of Why into the country of How.

II. When you come to the point you are ready to make this move you can remember this fact: it is possible to transfer the center of your life into an area where you are not at the mercy of what the world can do to you. In wild realms of experience the world has the upper hand. It can blind you, burn you and mash you under its heel. But there is an inner area where you are not at the mercy of the world. There, though the world is strong, you are greater and stronger. Lawrence the Martyr, for example, was roasted to death on a gridiron. After they had had him over a slow fire for sometime, so the story runs, he looked up at his torturers and said, "Turn me over. That side is done."

Lawrence the ~~Martyr~~ Martyr had succeeded in moving the center of his life into an area where he was not at the mercy of his torturers. Now the secret of such a victory lies in the insight that the big thing in life is not what happens to you, but in the way you take what happens to you. The New Testament has two truths which will help you to put this to work.

The first is in the statement of our text. Paul says this, "We triumph even in troubles, knowing that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character and character produces hope."

What this mean is this: if you set yourself primarily to seek character, and to grow a soul, you can use any experience short of death and insanity that the world can present you. Out of any situation you can emerge a better person, if that is what you want. If you are primarily after wealth, the world can whip you. If you are primarily after pleasure, the world can banish you. If you are primarily after fame, the world can defeat you. But if you are primarily growing a soul, you can ~~not~~ capitalize on anything life does to you. Happiness can make you more radiant; bereavement can leave you more wise, more sympathetic, more understanding. All things can be made to work together for good, for your real good; and so you, like Paul, triumph in trouble, knowing that trouble produces endurance, and endurance produces character and character produces hope.

Dr. E. Stanley Jones, tells of watching an eagle in the Himalaya mountains one day when a storm struck. He expected the eagle to be dashed to death against the rocks by the fury of the wind, but instead, the eagle set his wings in such a way that the harder the wind blew the higher he rose by it.

The ability to capitalize on adverse winds when the storms begin to blow is one of the secrets of our faith. The sacred writer tells us that the Lord himself was made perfect through suffer-

ing. If you will remember that according to Jesus that purpose of life is not comfort but character, you can head toward that and make anything serve your aim. You can be like the man who one day met a wolf at the door and came out wearing a fur coat.

Most often we try to run in the wrong gear. We say to ourselves We are whipped, beaten, up against it, circumstances are too strong for us. We try to serve God, and all we get for it is a peck of trouble. Paul might have said that but he didn't. What he did was shift gears from low to high. He said something like this: "Life is intended to make a man of me, and any situation can be made and used to serve that end." On that gear you can make the grade and find yourself on top of the world; you will know that even if the worst happens, it can be turned into the best.

Walk through another door, and you will see that the N.T. has a second truth: Paul was put in prison in Rome. He had always wanted to go to Rome, but not as a jailbird. Yet it is hard to keep a good man down, and before you knew it this little crippled Christian man was making his influence felt among members of the prison guard. When he wrote his letter to his friends at Philippi you find him saying: "I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."

What the apostle was saying was this: not only is it possible to use your tough breaks so that they make a better man of you, but you can also use them so that they become an opportunity to do something for other people. If you find yourself imprisoned within the confines of some hated handicap or cruel providence that you did not expect, remember what Helen Keller has meant to blind people, and you begin asking yourself: how can I handle this thing to keep others from losing their faith but rather make them confident in the Lord. The challenge of it will speak to the hero in your soul and give you courage.

A great blow came to Dr. Robert E. Speer, the apostle of world missions in the northern Presbyterian Church in 1937. His son Elliot, was murdered, by an unknown person. This incident was the greatest test of his christian faith and character. Concerning it he wrote to a friend: "One's only and adequate light is to think of what God allowed to happen in the life of His Only Son and to be sure that even out of the deepest evil He can bring."

One Sunday morning Dr. Speer was preaching on the psalmist's



Beloved,  
we are God's  
children now

*1 John 3:2*

# MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE

FEBRUARY 23, 1997

10:30 AM

## PREPARATION OF OUR HEARTS FOR WORSHIP

*"Let the people be in silent meditation and prayer upon entering the sanctuary."*

### WE PRAISE GOD

PRELUDE

CHORAL INTROIT

*"God Is So Good"*

Organist  
Youth Choir

PRAYER OF PREPARATION

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§HYMN OF PRAISE

*"Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley"*

# 80

‡CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: *Lord, we know you are a kind and patient God.*

People: *Hear us in this holy season.*

Leader: *Lord, we know you are a gracious God.*

People: *Help us in this holy season.*

Leader: *Lord, help us to be more like you every day.*

People: *Renew us in this holy season.*

### WE CONFESS OUR SINS

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (In Unison)

*Gracious God, we confess that comfort, pleasure, and security claim such high places in our priorities that we often remain deaf to your claims and ignorant of your will for us. We confess, too, our anxiety because our neighborhoods are no longer comfortable or secure and sometimes not even happy places to live. Forgive us, loving Father, for ignoring your commands to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with you. We repent of our carelessness and disobedience and ask for that new frame of mind that will enable us to spread your joy, proclaim your steadfast love, and become peacemakers in our broken world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

DECLARATION OF PARDON

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

*"The Apostle's Creed"*  
*The Presbyterian Hymnal*

p. 14

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## WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD

ANTHEM

*"I Heard The Voice Of Jesus Say"*  
*Sharday Henderson & Melody Ramon, Soloists*

Youth Choir

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PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Leader: *Lift up your hearts*

People: *We lift them up to the Lord.*

Leader: *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

People: *It is right to give our thanks and praise.*

Leader: *Let us pray.*

PASTORAL PRAYER

CHORAL RESPONSE

*"The Lord's Prayer"*

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CHILDREN'S SERMON

RITUAL OF FRIENDSHIP

*Or, Willie T. Higgins*

GIVING OF TITHES AND OFFERINGS

OFFERTORY MUSIC

*"Nobody Knows But The Lord"*  
*Andrew West, Soloist*

DOXOLOGY

*"Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow"*

OFFERTORY PRAYER

THREEFOLD AMEN

### GOD SPEAKS TO US

SCRIPTURE

Joan Reavis

Romans 5:1-11

MUSICAL SELECTION

*"I'm Going To Walk All Over God's Heaven"*  
*Katherine Hodge, Soloist*

Youth Choir

SERMON

*"How Can I Learn To Take It?"*  
Rev. George W. Smith

INVITATIONAL HYMN

*"Lord, I Want To Be A Christian"*

# 372

BENEDICTION

CHORAL BENEDICTION

*"Jesus, The Light"*

Youth Choir

ORGAN POSTLUDE

§ Congregation standing  
‡ Congregation sitting  
\*\*\*\* Worshippers will be seated

**TO OUR GUESTS.** You are welcome to our worship service and all activities of the church. Please help us to know you by signing the record of attendance sheet as you enter the foyer. You are invited to meet with others in the Fellowship Hall for refreshments. Please come again and invite your friends and neighbors to come with you.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE CHRIST AS YOUR SAVIOR,** we invite you to come to the front of the sanctuary during the Invitational Hymn. Elders Lola Buie and Louise Fowler will be at the front of the sanctuary to greet you.

**THE USHERS FOR TODAY** are Ray Hill, Chip Hodge, Al Littlefield, D'maj Smith. The Ushers today are also responsible for loading the food for the homeless.

**HOSTING THE FELLOWSHIP HOUR TODAY** will be Mr. And Mrs. N.L. Allen and Rev. Smith in honor of the 40th Anniversary Committee.

**THE FLOWERS FOR TODAY** were placed in the sanctuary by the Watts family in loving memory of Mrs. Lois Davis.

**PREPARING FOOD FOR THE HOMELESS TODAY** will be **THE YOUTH.** If you are asked to help prepare or purchase food, please do it with a smile! We love your time and talent. Thank you.

**CHRIST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SAN DIEGO**

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