

## Sunday Morning Message

September 6, 2020

*Keep Going Even When You Are Going Through It*

Topic – persevering and abounding through affliction

Text – Philippians 4:1 - 13

Congregational Reading – Philippians 4:10 – 13

Introduction (read verses 10 – 13 again)

Justin preached from this passage yesterday and he inspired me to develop it further into a message that will help us as we deal with these seemingly never-ending difficult days of Covid-19 and much political, racial, cultural, and economic unrest and uncertainty here in our nation.

The subject of our message this morning is on the topic of affliction and abasement. How are we going to continue serving the Lord during these difficult days?

Affliction has to do with suffering painful circumstances. It could be physically, it could be financial, or it could merely be a verbal attack. It could be a direct result of something that is lacking on our part. In other words, God may be allowing us to go through some affliction because he is trying to correct something within us. Possibly, we may be brought through some painful experiences because God wants us to glorify Him through it.

God's people have never been excluded from affliction – the good health and prosperity gospel that is prevalent in our society simply is not truth.

The people of God experienced great affliction at the hands of the Egyptians:

*"But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel." - (Exodus 1:12)*

The affliction, however, was used of God – at least partially - to grow them.

Paul was arguably the greatest servant of the Lord in the Bible, but he endured tremendous affliction in his life.

*"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in*

*fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities." - (2 Corinthians 11:23-30)*

Affliction will be an important part of our walk with the Lord. Without, we simply cannot grow, and if we do not grow in our walk with the Lord, we will never abound in the work of the Lord.

Illustrate – exercise – just as a little pain and discomfort is necessary for the physical building of strength, spiritual pain is sometimes necessary for spiritual growth.

Here are some things that Paul said about affliction:

*"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. 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." - (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)*

Regarding the churches of Macedonia, he said:

*"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." - (2 Corinthians 8:1-2)*

Paul wrote to Thessalonica, one of those Macedonian churches:

*"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia." - (1 Thessalonians 1:5-7)*

Affliction not only helps us to grow, it also reveals the genuineness of our faith.

Anybody can abound on the mountaintop, but it will be the deep valleys that will reveal who we really are.

Jesus told the disciples in the Parable of the Sower:

*"But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." - (Matthew 13:20-21)*

The bottom line to this message is this: we cannot bypass affliction, if we are going to succeed and abound in the spiritual life. It is necessary.

Back in our text, Paul specifically refers to abasement, which is one type of affliction.

*"I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." - (Philippians 4:12-13)*

Notice that says "to be abased", which means that this abasement is not something that he is doing to himself, it is something that is being done to him, and it is permitted by God.

To be "abased" means to be humbled, to be put down or brought low – it means to be humiliated.

It is God's will for us to be afflicted at times. It is even God's will for us to be humiliated at times – to be humbled.

Thank God – not all of the time. Paul also said that he knew how to abound. There are many mountaintops in the Christian life – many great days.

Illustrate – Yesterday, I enjoyed a great day. Breakfast with our men. An enjoyable and relaxing early afternoon studying, and then dinner with some of the men of Bible Baptist in New Egypt.

But not every day is a mountaintop – there will be many days that are trying and difficult – many days that are painful.

## Transition

How are we going to get through the affliction and the humiliation, so that we will grow to the point where we are abounding in the work of the Lord?

This text will help us.

## I Determine to Keep Going (v. 1)

*"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." - (1 Corinthians 15:58)*

To be steadfast and unmoveable means that we continue doing the things the Lord wants us to do, even when it is difficult or painful to do.

Affliction and abasement will want to move you to quit – don't quit.

Illustrate – Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, and Lystra where Paul was stoned and left for dead. They were able to keep

going because they had already determined that the road was going to be hard. They did not have any false expectations about what it really meant to live for God, and to serve Him.

They knew what God called them to do, and they had realistic expectations about what it would take to get the job done.

We sing the song:

“It’s a battlefield brother not a recreation room, it’s a fight and not a game. Run if you want to, run if you will, but I came here to stay.”

Trials will cause discouragement, and discouragement is one of Satan’s greatest weapons:

It was advertised that the devil was going to put his tools up for sale. On the date of the sale the tools were placed for public inspection, each being marked with its sale price. There were a treacherous lot of implements. Hatred, Envy, Jealousy, Doubt, Lying, Pride, and so on. Laid apart from the rest of the pile was a harmless-looking tool, well-worn and priced very high.

“The name of the tool?” asked one of the purchasers.

“Oh,” said the adversary, “that’s Discouragement.”

“Why have you priced it so high?”

“Because it’s more useful to me than the others. I can pry open and get inside a person’s heart with that one, when I cannot get near him with other tools. Now once I get inside, I can make him do what I choose. It’s a badly worn tool, because I use it on almost everyone since few people know it belongs to me.”

The devil’s price for Discouragement was so high, he never sold it. It’s still his major tool, and he still uses it on God’s people today.<sup>1</sup>

## II Make the Best of Bad Circumstances (vs. 4 - 5)

*Rejoice in the Lord, always...*

Rejoicing is a natural byproduct of positive circumstances, but it is not something that comes naturally during the tough times. When we are afflicted, our natural inclination will be to complain.

How can you rejoice in affliction?

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<sup>1</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart and 1501 Other Stories* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 164.

1 Know that God is in control.

2 Know that God will deliver you eventually, if you don't quit.

3 Look for the blessings that are still present even in the midst of your suffering.

There are some wonderful blessings that will be revealed in even the worst situations.

Notice v. 5:

*"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."* - (Philippians 4:5)

The word moderation can mean gentleness, but it also has been translated into the word "patience".

In this context, I believe it has the idea of quietly enduring – not complaining. Why? because people are watching, and the Lord return is near. In other words, it is not the time to be focused on ourselves and our own comfort or temporal happiness.

### **III Pray – But Don't Expect the Lord to Remove the Thorn (vs. 6 – 7)**

Notice that God tells us to pray, but He does not promise to give us the answer that we desire. He promises peace.

Peace through a storm – peace through affliction is perhaps the greatest blessing that God can give us – even greater than the removal of the trial.

*"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."* - (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

Someone once said that the foundation of gratitude is the expectation of nothing.

Brother Fisher taught us that true contentment comes when we lower our wants to the level of our have's.

### **IV Keep Your Eyes on the Lord (vs. 8 – 9)**

Keep the right focus. Think on the right things. Listen to the right voices. God will give you more peace.

Times will come in your life when nobody can help you but the Lord:

I thank God for bitter things;  
They've been a "friend to grace";

They've driven me from paths of ease  
To storm the secret place.  
I Thank Him for the friends who failed  
To fill my heart's deep need;  
They've driven me to the Savior's feet,  
Upon His love to feed.  
I'm grateful too, through all life's way  
No one could satisfy,  
And so I've found in God alone  
My rich, my full supply!

—Florence Willett, quoted in V. Raymond Edman, *The Disciplines of Life*<sup>2</sup>

Stop listening to the voices of doom and gloom out there. Remember that we are: “*more than conquerors through him that loved us.*” (Romans 8:37b KJV)

We have already won the war, but we may have to endure a few more battles before it is all over.

Determine to keep going – don't quit – don't become weary in well-doing.

Learn to rejoice – make the best of an unpleasant situation.

Pray fervently – but don't expect God to take every thorn away.

Keep your eyes on God

If we will do these things, God will cause us to walk closely with him, and eventually we will get to the point where we are abounding, or thriving, in the work the work of the Lord, and before we know, it will all be over, and we will finally reach the end of our destination – eternity in a place where there are no trials, no pain, no sorrows – just Heaven!

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<sup>2</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart and 1501 Other Stories* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 581–582.