

OUR TROUBLED LIVES



I

Our Troubled Lives

Working the Work of the Lord

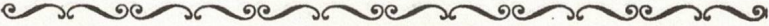
ZERUBBABEL was beset with troubles when the angel brought him the Word of the Lord through the prophet: “Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).

How often we have heard those words applied to problems of today, as if they were a warning against human effort in Kingdom work! But they were not that. Indeed not—for the Lord encouraged Zerubbabel in the work of his hands. The angel says, “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands shall also finish it.” The Spirit of the Lord, using the hands of Zerubbabel, would accomplish the work, though physical might and power to match that of the enemy was lacking in the little band of zealous workers.

There are Christians who maintain that the godly life is a life of quiet submission, of patient waiting—waiting upon the Lord, till He perform His own work. “For the battle is the Lord’s” and “Jehovah shall fight for you,” they say.

In Old Testament times it did occur that Jehovah bade His people stand aside and wait. When Israel was before the Red Sea, panic-stricken at the sound of Pharaoh’s armed horseman coming after them, the Lord gave command,

THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS



“Do not fight! I will fight for you!” And they stood still, while the waves of the sea awaited His Word of power.

Why was Israel spared a bloody battle and permitted to walk safely and comfortably through the Red Sea? Because the Lord was about to perform a miracle at which all the nations would stand amazed, making the bottom of the Sea a pathway for Israel and a grave for Pharaoh and all his host. And, in order that His power and greatness might shine forth with greater glory, the miracle must be wholly free from human mediation.

God works by one of two methods—through man or without man, mediately or immediately.

When He chooses to work immediately, He commands man to stand aside, to be still and wait, to keep hands off.

But the era of such miraculous intervention is past. Wonders such as of old God does not choose to perform now, though at the return of Jesus upon the clouds He will again thus gloriously manifest His power. In the meanwhile, He is working mediately, through us. And it is ours to be up and doing; ours to work the work of the Lord; ours to labor in the Name of the Lord, amid troubles that beset us on every hand.

Let us be warned, however, that mere human effort, labor not inspired by the One in whose hand are all things, is vain and abominable. A man may *think* that he labors in the Name of the Lord, yet be busy in his own strength and for himself.

It is important that we *know*.

Whence Our Troubles Come

The Christian life is not an easy life. We, like Zerubbabel, are beset by enemies.

OUR TROUBLED LIVES



In general the powers that constantly oppose and threaten us are three: nature, man, and fallen angels. Our troubles and miseries always come from one or the other of these three. And now the question to be considered is this: What attitude would God have us take toward these three and the troubles they bring?

First let us consider what is involved.

Nature is arrayed against us in practically all of its activities. Instead of living in Paradise, we are in a restless world where there is little peace or harmony. Immediately after the fall, God drove man out of Paradise and told him that the world would henceforth be in enmity against him. It would bring forth thorns and thistles; where it once grew fruit in abundance for the picking, it would now yield the best only if man labored hard. Woman must bear children in pain. And at last the earth would triumphantly reclaim man—the most beautiful creature of God's making must return to dust.

Throughout history men have found this pronouncement of God true, and it is true today.

What a world it is! Storms at sea have swallowed up untold numbers of victims. From the depths of earth ominous rumblings arise, and the earth trembles under volcanic pressure. Cloudburst, hail, frost, heat, flood and fire and wind—they all bring ruin and death.

Nature further vents its fury against man in a thousand plagues aimed at his very life. Pestilence creeps out of stagnant swamp and dense jungle. Invisible microbes and viruses enter our very blood and bones. Disease rages among the cattle from which we obtain food. We must constantly be watchful against hordes of insects. Little creatures such as the field mouse decimate our crops, and strong wild beasts

THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS



of the forest prey upon human beings. Because of sin nature has been so disrupted that it makes a dreadful picture.

Nature also resists the birth of every child, so that women everywhere moan in travail. And men by the millions are bowed under the burden of toil for daily food.

Then there is the inevitable final triumph of nature over every human being, for his body shall decay and the earth shall reclaim its own.

Beautiful nature! But how terrible is the destructive power which it wields against man!

Man's struggle with man is of a different kind. Among men there is love and hatred, and both bring suffering. Yes, love brings joy and beauty and comfort. But it also brings sorrow. For because of love we share the sorrow of others and our sorrow also becomes theirs. Ask a mother if she does not suffer just because she loves her child so dearly!

At the root of man's enmity to man, however, lies hatred. Not that we need live in mortal fear lest someone knock us down, rob us, or kill us, out of pure hatred. That seldom happens. The situation is much more complicated. It is this: We cannot each walk our little path alone. We must have contact with other people—in social, civil, business or other activities. And then two possibilities are usually present—either we step back and let the other fellow have top place, or we keep the other fellow down and capture the booty ourselves. The result is jealousy, envy, pride, disobedience, suspicion, deceit, falsehood—a host of evils that are poison in the human heart. To a man of noble character they give grief and pain. In the man of little soul they breed hatred and revenge.

OUR TROUBLED LIVES



Then there is the worst and deadliest of man's enemies, the devil—the worst because he has an ally within the heart of each one of us.

Years may slip by before we notice what is going on, that we are being gradually dragged down to hell. While we are blissfully unaware, evil grows and flourishes in our hearts. Until Christ comes to claim us. Then, when the evil must out, the struggle begins. What a struggle it is! Temptation luring us with a terrible power. Satan holding on fiercely to his prey. There are times when we cry out in agony.

Those who live deeply experience it thus.

Many, very many, live superficially and never experience much of a struggle. They protest that such a view of life is too dismal and morbid.

There are some who try to whistle away their troubles, and some who hide an embittered heart behind laughing lips.

But that does not change facts. If you would know the true character of life, ask the man who seeks to know the truth, and who has matured in the experiences of life. He will tell you that which men of long ago also affirmed: Life is at best a struggle. Our years may number seventy, or if we are very strong eighty, but they are filled with labor and sorrow.

Finally—and this brings us face to face with the awful seriousness of life—trouble and sorrow has come upon us *from God*. He has willed it. He has deemed it necessary.

Therein we see God's righteousness, and also His Providence. For all God's attributes are but the vari-colored rays emanating from the Divine Being. Thus His Providence and the vindication of His righteousness go hand in hand.

THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS



Man sinned. And a sinner could not remain in Paradise. He did not belong there.

A ruined man is at home in a ruined world.

Since man took a stand of enmity against God, it is right that enmity should be arrayed against him. We *must* have enemies, even deadly enemies.

And the Lord God loosed against man three enemies: nature, man, and the demons.

Thus we are daily the targets of evil forces that plot against our welfare and against our very lives. The Lord has willed it so. Enemies are before us and behind us, visible and invisible, waylaying, tripping, instigating, oppressing, day and night.

Whether the arrow is in the form of lightning from the sky, or an angry denunciation by a friend, or an evil suggestion within the heart whispered by Satan, it is always intended for the ruin of our souls. We are the targets. The evil may come in many attractive forms, but it is aimed at your soul's life. Evil will beset you and hound you, and would surely choke you did you not escape to the City of Refuge.

Living by Principle

We Christians, members of the Body of Christ, live our mundane lives from day to day. We speak, we plan, we decide, we act. But it is well to pause for a moment and ask the question: On what ground do we make our decisions and plan our actions? Why do we choose to do thus and so, rather than otherwise? What guides us in our planning and doing?

The actual conditions today, as we look about for an answer to that question, are enough to make one weep. For we find that leaders as well as laymen (with a few precious

OUR TROUBLED LIVES



exceptions) have completely forgotten that there is such a thing as principle, that there is a rule by which to measure our everyday activities. Each does "as it seems good in his own eyes."

What we choose to do or not do is no longer, it seems, a matter of must—a must founded upon the eternal principles of God's Word and Will. What we do is a matter of our own choosing.

For one will say, "This is the way he does it, and that looks good to me." At another time he may say, "I made good by that course of action; I shall use the same method again." Or, "This is what he wants done, and it is my business to please him." Some say, "Oh, I just happened to feel like doing that!" Or, "It *works* best that way!"

We are sorely in need of a reminder that there is only one guiding principle for all Christian activity, for every choice and action in the life of a Christian. That guiding principle asks: What is the will of God concerning this?

Now in regard to the subject at hand. We are beset by three evil forces—the devil, sinners, and nature's destructions; or let us say—by fallen angels, fallen man, and fallen nature: And the question arises: What would God have us do about it? Would He have us submit without struggle or self-defence to the powers that threaten us? Or does He require that we shall defend ourselves?

Note that the question is not: *May* we defend ourselves?

That would lead to a weak and spineless Christianity, springing from some such philosophy as this: God is high above; we here below, seeking to satisfy our own desires, must try not to incur His displeasure; but for the most He will in loving-kindness overlook our human frailties and our errors.

THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS



No, my dear reader, our God is not that kind of God.

He is THE LORD OF HOSTS. His are the hosts of heaven. And with His creatures upon earth He does whatsoever He wills.

The Lord of lords, the Almighty, has a *will*. A will that applies in every case, and to every person. How can we possibly conceive of a God who waits to see what shall happen?

Therefore the reasoning in regard to our present problem is not: What will God *let* us do? Will He permit us to protect ourselves if we so wish?

Such would be a dishonor to His Name.

Such a God would not be a God clothed in majesty.

No! The question must be put thus: The God who, because of our sins, loosed against us the three destructive powers, did He intend that we should resist them and defend ourselves? Or did He intend that we should be overwhelmed by these evils?

He who would live the Godly life seeks to know the *will* of God exactly. He asks no more and no less.

That applies in this matter also. It must.

And what that will of God may be we cannot conclude from our own opinions, or from our own whims and wishes. The question must be answered from the Lord's own revelation. Has He revealed His will on this question? If so, what is it? How must we act overagainst the three inimical powers arrayed against us—the devil, sinners, and natural disasters? The Thorns and Thistles, the Cains, and the Old Serpent?

The answer is not easy. It is complicated, many sided.

Let us begin where we can see our way most clearly and easily, with the spiritual struggle Satan brings upon us.

II.

Man Versus Satan

Who Is Satan?

GOD created Satan. He made Satan a superior and splendid creature. We may safely say that Satan has qualities which place him in a supreme position among all God's creatures. Sincere Christians have even called him the rival of the Lord Jesus Christ. And not without reason. Consider how Scripture contrasts him with the Christ, as it were putting them on one level. Satan is the ruler of the hosts of evil, Christ is Head of the armies of the Lord. Scripture pictures for us two spirit kingdoms, each with its leader, and in opposition to each other. For neither among the good angels nor among men is there any leader over against Christ. Only Satan, head of the hosts of evil spirits, has that appalling position of power.

Further, let us remember that Christ has His great authority and power only as "God revealed in the flesh." But Satan, for all his astounding power, is a mere creature! One cannot help wondering what he might have become, had he not rebelled, had he remained in his angelic state! Even now, though fallen away from God through mutiny, he inspires us with awe; to what grandeur might he not have risen if, instead of falling *away* from God, he had fallen down before Him in eternal worship and devotion?