

2. The Crucibles that Come

Biblical material: Jer. 9:7-16, Rom. 1:21-32, 2 Cor. 12:7-12, 1 Pet. 4:12-19, 5:8-11.

Quotes

- Love hurts. Feelings are disturbing. People are taught that pain is evil and dangerous. How can they deal with love if they're afraid to feel? Pain is meant to wake us up. People try to hide their pain. But they're wrong. Pain is something to carry, like a radio. You feel your strength in the experience of pain. It's all in how you carry it. That's what matters. Pain is a feeling. Your feelings are a part of you. Your own reality. If you feel ashamed of them, and hide them, you're letting society destroy your reality. You should stand up for your right to feel your pain. *Jim Morrison*
- Pain and death are part of life. To reject them is to reject life itself. *Havelock Ellis*
- We cannot learn without pain. *Aristotle*
- No pain, no palm; no thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no cross, no crown. *William Penn*
- There is purpose in pain, Otherwise it were devilish. *Lord Lytton*
- It's odd that you can get so anesthetized by your own pain or your own problem that you don't quite fully share the hell of someone close to you. *Lady Bird Johnson*
- God is a concept by which we measure our pain. *John Lennon*

Questions

To what degree should we appreciate painful experiences? Is salvation all about "true grit"? While life always has pain and sadness, how should we relate to this? How much do we look for these "crucibles"? Are they crucibles that God sends? What is God's intent in all of this, and how should we portray God's involvement?

Discussion / Comment

Jeremiah 9:7-16 portrays an apparently vindictive God. He is identified as the one who has made the land a desert and turned Jerusalem into ruins. The reason given is disobedience to the law. Consequently, "I will make this people eat bitter food and drink poisoned water. I will scatter them among nations that neither they nor their fathers have known, and I will pursue them with the sword until I have destroyed them." (vv.15, 16 NIV).

Recognizing that both in the Old Testament, and still occasionally in the New, God has ascribed to him qualities and actions that relate to his overall sovereignty rather than specific cause—such as the usual example given regarding the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. But here God specifically does make threats, ones which are indeed carried out to some degree. So what to make of this "pain-causing" God?

Much lies in the interpretation of one's own experience, which both influences and is influenced by one's picture of God. Romans 1 makes it clear that "God gives up" on people if they really want, allowing them the consequences of their actions. How strange then to blame God for the results!

In that sense, then, pain is important. Not because it is to be appreciated, but it is part of the consequence, and the learning. The conclusion that must not be drawn is that it is God sending the pain, and even enjoying the process. That speaks to the Devil's picture of God rather than pain and suffering being the natural consequence of sin and evil.

As Peter says, don't be surprised at pain, or think it strange. This is one of the lessons we are learning as part of our experience in the great controversy. Sin causes pain, and the innocent suffer with the guilty. It's not fair, it's not right, but it's what happens!

Commenting on Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, Ellen White says: "Jesus was the foundation of the Jewish economy, the author of all their laws, statutes, and requirements. How his soul was pained and his heart filled with grief as he saw those who claimed to be the depositaries of truth, mercy, and compassion, so destitute of the love of God. The Saviour is guiding. He has hold of man and of the throne of divinity. In the providence of God, the priest and Levite were brought in contact with a suffering fellow creature, that they might minister to him. Christ is constantly weaving the web of human events. He placed this suffering man where one who had sympathy and compassion would give attention to his needs. The Lord permits suffering and calamity to come upon men and women to call us out of our selfishness, to awaken in us the attributes of his character,--compassion, tenderness, and love." {RH, October 10, 1899}

Clearly God in the great controversy perspective allows the world to continue following the choices of Satan and human beings, and consequently permits the results of suffering. But he is not identified as the author of suffering, the God who sends pain.

Ellen White Comments

The fall of our first parents, with all the woe that has resulted, he [Satan] charges upon the Creator, leading men to look upon God as the author of sin, and suffering, and death. Jesus was to unveil this deception. {DA 24}

It was generally believed by the Jews that sin is punished in this life. Every affliction was regarded as the penalty of some wrongdoing, either of the sufferer himself or of his parents. It is true that all suffering results from the transgression of God's law, but this truth had become perverted. Satan, the author of sin and all its results, had led men to look upon disease and death as proceeding from God,--as punishment arbitrarily inflicted on account of sin. Hence one upon whom some great affliction or calamity had fallen had the additional burden of being regarded as a great sinner. Thus the way was prepared for the Jews to reject Jesus. He who "hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" was looked upon by the Jews as "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted;" and they hid their faces from Him. Isa. 53:4, 3. {DA 471}

In Isaiah's day the spiritual understanding of mankind was dark through misapprehension of God. Long had Satan sought to lead men to look upon their Creator as the author of sin and suffering and death. Those whom he had thus deceived, imagined that God was hard and exacting. They regarded Him as watching to denounce and condemn, unwilling to receive the sinner so long as there was a legal excuse for not helping him. The law of love by which heaven is ruled had been misrepresented by the archdeceiver as a restriction upon men's happiness, a burdensome yoke from which they should be glad to escape. He declared that its precepts could not be obeyed and that the penalties of transgression were bestowed arbitrarily.

In losing sight of the true character of Jehovah, the Israelites were without excuse. Often had God revealed Himself to them as one "full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth." Psalm 86:15. "When Israel was a child," He testified, "then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt." Hosea 11:1.

Tenderly had the Lord dealt with Israel in their deliverance from Egyptian bondage and in their journey to the Promised Land. "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old. Isaiah 63:9. {PK 311-2}

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