

5. Extreme Heat

Biblical material: Genesis 22, Job 1:6-2:10, Isa. 43:1-7, Hos. 2:1-12, 2 Cor. 11:23-29.

Quotes

- God allows us to experience the low points of life in order to teach us lessons we could not learn in any other way. The way we learn those lessons is not to deny the feelings but to find the meanings underlying them. *Stanley Lindquist*
- We're not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be. *C. S. Lewis*
- Don't ask God to change the laws of nature for you.... A man should believe in God through faith, not because of miracles. *Nachman of Bratslav*
- When you are arguing against Him you are arguing against the very power that makes you able to argue at all. *C. S. Lewis*
- The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man. *G. K. Chesterton*

Questions

If it's the extreme heat that purifies us, shouldn't we go looking for it? Isn't persecution definite proof that we are right? If we think God is telling us to do something extreme, shouldn't we just do it, no questions asked? How would you answer those that point to the "power of the Spirit" as proof that they are right? Did it really please the Lord to bruise Jesus?

Discussion/ Comment

As the wife of the famous Christian writer C S Lewis was dying, Lewis wrote, "Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not 'So there's no God after all', but 'So this is what God's really like.'" —*A Grief Observed* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1961) pp. 6, 7. When things become really painful, some of us reject God completely. For others like Lewis, there is the temptation to change our view of God and imagine all sorts of bad things about Him. The question is, Just how hot can it get? How much heat is God willing to risk putting His people through in order to bring about His ultimate purpose of shaping us into the "likeness of his Son"? (Rom. 8:29, NIV). (Sabbath afternoon's lesson).

The lesson uses the examples of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, Hosea and Gomer, the suffering of Job, and Paul's personal experience. How does God look in such stories? How should we react? For example, Sunday's lesson on Abraham being asked to sacrifice Isaac states, "God's request and its timing was not random. Indeed, it was calculated to exert the deepest possible anguish..." Do you agree/disagree? Why?

The memory text tells us: "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand" (Isaiah 53:10, NKJV). How would you explain this? How does it "please" God to bruise his son Jesus? As we try to answer, we do well to remember the words of Thomas Paine, "The belief in a cruel God makes a cruel man."

The lesson acknowledges this potential problem: "So far this quarter, we have considered many examples of the crucibles that God uses to bring purity and Christlikeness to our lives. However, some people may view these examples and conclude that God is a severe and demanding taskmaster. Sure, some may say, 'We know that God wants something good for us,

but these examples don't reveal much care and love. Instead, God looks more like a bully. He sets out on a purpose that causes us considerable hard times, and there's nothing we can do about it.'" (Thursday's lesson). The answer that is given in the lesson is rather weak. How could we explain this better?

We are also referred again to Job's experience. Job was at a disadvantage compared to those who read his story in later times—he did not have the prologue! The story of Job is eloquent on the nature of "extreme heat." Some important points must not be missed. It was God who initiated the consideration of Job—because of who he was. The problems did not originate with God—they are clearly identified as the work of Satan. And the real theological problems begin when the friends turn up! In our consideration of what to tell people who are suffering, let us not make Job's comforters our model, except when they sat in silence with him for seven days, perhaps!

While not denying the severity of troubles that come to us, let us not be overwhelmed by what might happen. Sometimes we become preoccupied by potential problems. Maybe we should bear in mind Winston Churchill's words, "When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened."

Ellen White Comments

Peter loved his Lord; but Jesus did not commend him for thus manifesting the desire to shield Him from suffering. Peter's words were not such as would be a help and solace to Jesus in the great trial before Him. They were not in harmony with God's purpose of grace toward a lost world, nor with the lesson of self-sacrifice that Jesus had come to teach by His own example. Peter did not desire to see the cross in the work of Christ. The impression which his words would make was directly opposed to that which Christ desired to make on the minds of His followers, and the Saviour was moved to utter one of the sternest rebukes that ever fell from His lips...

Satan was trying to discourage Jesus, and turn Him from His mission; and Peter, in his blind love, was giving voice to the temptation. The prince of evil was the author of the thought. His instigation was behind that impulsive appeal. In the wilderness, Satan had offered Christ the dominion of the world on condition of forsaking the path of humiliation and sacrifice. Now he was presenting the same temptation to the disciple of Christ. He was seeking to fix Peter's gaze upon the earthly glory, that he might not behold the cross to which Jesus desired to turn his eyes. And through Peter, Satan was again pressing the temptation upon Jesus. But the Saviour heeded it not; His thought was for His disciple. Satan had interposed between Peter and his Master, that the heart of the disciple might not be touched at the vision of Christ's humiliation for him. The words of Christ were spoken, not to Peter, but to the one who was trying to separate him from his Redeemer. "Get thee behind Me, Satan." No longer interpose between Me and My erring servant. Let Me come face to face with Peter, that I may reveal to him the mystery of My love.

It was to Peter a bitter lesson, and one which he learned but slowly, that the path of Christ on earth lay through agony and humiliation. The disciple shrank from fellowship with his Lord in suffering. But in the heat of the furnace fire he was to learn its blessing. Long afterward, when his active form was bowed with the burden of years and labors, he wrote, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." 1 Peter 4:12, 13. {DA 415-6}

