

## **Tribulation Worketh**

*A Transcribed Sermon by Dean Stump*

I want to show you clearly, from the word of God, that “tribulation worketh.” Tribulation has its place in your life today. As long as you are clothed in your body of flesh, it will be a part of your life. It is not something that you should try to run from. I don’t believe that you should try to run into it, but neither should you try to run from it, because God says that “tribulation worketh.”

For our Scripture passage, let’s turn to Romans chapter five. I’d like to read the first eight verses:

*“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*

According to Strong’s, tribulation is defined as “pressure or affliction or anguish, being burdened, or persecution, or trouble.” The 1828 Webster’s dictionary defines it as “severe affliction, or distresses of life, sometimes coming from persecution.” Also in Webster’s tribulation means “to thrash, or to beat.”

Do we know what it means to thrash something? Unfortunately, in this industrialized nation, we go through our corn fields and wheat fields with a machine, and the grain comes rolling out—we don’t think much about the threshing that the grain went through. However, in a third-world country, they still clearly understand what it is to thrash, or to beat something. I’ve watched them do it in Ghana, and it’s a very painstaking job. They beat the crop with threshing instruments to get the meat of the crop separated from the chaff, which was at one point a very necessary part of that grain.

My personal testimony, is like that of the psalmist David when he said *“before I was afflicted and tribulation came upon me, I went astray”* (Psalm 119:67). When I was seventeen years old, I can remember clearly sitting in my father’s living room with visitors present. I remember the feelings I had of superiority over my father, and feeling the need to bring correction to him. I felt this way because I thought that I had greater knowledge than my father, who was some years my senior. What a shame. What a proud heart I had! My loving heavenly Father (who I didn’t know at that time was my father) understood what I needed. He knew that I needed tribulation in my life, so I would be at a place of nothingness and humility. Very soon after (still seventeen years old with a proud heart), I remember ice-skating out on the pond, knowing that I was unconquerable, knowing that no one was going to make this young, proud heart surrender.

God knew what I needed. All God had to do was allow an accident to happen which caused my shoulder to be dislocated, and bring me to a place of suffering—of suffering that I had never experienced before. Now I can look back and say, “Tribulation worketh.” Also, when I was still seventeen years old, months after injuring my shoulder, and with a brand new truck with only 3,000 miles and that same proud heart, knowing that the world spun under my feet, I had an accident and rolled my truck. It was only the mercy of God that my life was preserved. Still not getting it, I fixed the truck, went another 3,000 miles, and wrecked it again. Soon after that I surrendered my heart and life to Jesus Christ. At that time that those things happened, I was slow to receive the correction that the Lord brought to me, but now I look back and say “tribulation worketh.” Praise God!

## Tribulation Comes in Many Ways

- It can be a pressure from within—the anguish of sin on our souls.
- It can come from well-meaning relatives that are opposed to us.
- It can be, as I've already mentioned, afflictions in our flesh—troubles that come to our physical bodies, or to our financial situation.
- It can come from our own selfishness, or from those who we love, or our enemies, or from the evil one seeking to destroy us.
- It can even come from God, who knows just when we need a spanking.
- It can come in a thousand different ways. Whatever its source, know that “tribulation worketh.”

When we encounter tribulation, our natural response is not to glory in it, as the apostle Paul mentions here. We read the first two verses of Romans 5, and we're excited that we can be justified and free from our sins, and that we can have our name written in the Lamb's book of life, and we say Praise God, I'm a child of the King! But Paul says in the very next verse that those things are not the only things to be excited about. We are also to rejoice in our tribulations, knowing that “tribulation worketh.” It does a good work in our hearts.

Jesus explains the benefit of suffering in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:20-21:

*“But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; [He says Praise God, I'm a child of the King!] 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.”*

This is the burden of my message. Where are you in regards to the suffering, to the tribulation, to the persecution, to the anguish, or the trouble that you have in your life today? Jesus says there are those that hear the word, and with joy receive it, but when tribulation comes their way, they're offended! Many of them, sadly, turn their back on God. When trouble comes our way, the natural man doesn't rejoice in it. There is the temptation to be discouraged.

When God gives you a spanking, you don't always have it fresh in your mind that “I'm getting this because my heavenly Papa loves me.” We don't always take it with our head bowed, and with our knees bent, do we? Sometimes we stiffen up. When my children become about three years of age, I'll sometimes give them a thorough explanation of how they need to receive a spanking—they need to surrender their will. It's a good sermon to preach to ourselves, isn't it?

Here's an important quote from G. D. Watson: “There's nothing more dangerous to your Christian life than uninterrupted prosperity.” There's nothing that will snuff out your spiritual life more effectively than uninterrupted prosperity, whether that be with health, or with finances, or with your mind, or the acceptance of your family. So when you're experiencing difficulty, remember that “tribulation worketh.”

Do you want God to work in your life? Do you want God to refine your character? Do you want God to take you beyond the place of “Praise God, I'm a child of His!”? The first year I was a Christian, I thought I experienced it all. It was wonderful! There was seemingly a grace over my life that shielded me from nearly everything—it seemed like I was undaunted by anything! Because of this, I thought I was a very victorious Christian for a while. Soon afterwards, tribulation started coming my way, and I started seeing ugly things come out of my life. Without that tribulation, I would have never seen those ugly parts of my character I had previously been unaware of.

## **Here's How *NOT* To Respond When Trouble Comes Your Way**

When in trouble, do not blame others. Don't blame God, and don't even blame Satan! To blame your troubles, pressures, and trials on others works many evils. It humiliates us, and it also sours the heart. It embitters the mind, and clouds the natural faculties, and thus poisons the very fountains of our spirits, which God designed to be sweetened and mellowed by the very trouble that we are disposed to complain of. To lay blame for our trouble on others protects our self-life. If you can find someone or something to blame your troubles on, it protects you from being crucified, and that's what Jesus wants! He said you can't even be His disciple if you can't take up your cross, and the cross means none other than suffering! The cross is not a physical emblem you carry around your neck. It's going to mean some form of suffering in your life! It's going to bring some persecution to you—it's designed to bring death. If you can push your tribulations upon someone else, you're going to miss that wonderful work God is trying to do in your life.

## **Here Are Four Things That Tribulation Should Lead Us To**

### **1. To detach us from “creature comforts” to a relationship with the Father**

Remember what I said about uninterrupted prosperity? Somehow, in the everyday routine of life, there can creep into our hearts a smugness and a complacency. We can become satisfied with the job that we have, and the abundant money, and other things. There's nothing to cause us to fall on our knees in desperation and humility and poverty of spirit before God, so that we would say, “Lord, without you, I'm not going to make it through the day!”

Without the pressures that can come from every side, we can be easily distracted from the living God who wants a relationship with us. He wants our dependence to be upon Him. If you are one of those stony-heart hearers, those pressures and tribulations can cause you to become bitter, and to blame others. You need to start thanking God that you're in the difficult situation your in, and start crying out to God to help you and give you grace in your time of need! Paul, with his thorn in the flesh, besought God to remove it from him, but no! God wanted to work something in Paul's character!

Maybe you can't jump up and dance with the sickness that plagues you, or that person that rubs you the wrong way, or that tribulation that you're going through. Maybe you don't have the grace today to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, but you can, at least, run to your heavenly Father with it, and cry out to Him to help you, and experience His everlasting arms around you and His grace poured into you. You will look back at the end of the day and realize, “I made it! The Lord helped me today! Thank you, heavenly Father!” You will start to learn that “tribulation worketh.”

### **2. To take Jesus as a partner of our pains**

In all our afflictions, He was afflicted. Note here in our text that “in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”, and “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” We were the problem—Christ was not the problem. But Christ took the responsibility upon Himself. He became a man, and became subjected to the temptations and the tribulations that you and I are subject to today, and did so all the way to the death on the cross, and all the way to the shedding of the last drop of blood in His body. He is a partner with us in our pain. He can sympathize with us. In all points that you are afflicted, that you are suffering, that you have anguish or pressures in your life, He was tempted, and understands what you're going through. Brothers and sisters, when the pressures come in on your life, here's what you need to do: Make Jesus your partner. Come unto Jesus, as he says in Matthew 11:28-30 “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Hear His cry in your time of anguish, in your time of pain and suffering, and rather than becoming embittered and trying to blame it on others, and God, and the devil (even while others, the devil, and even God may have a real part in it), instead thank God for the opportunity you have to relate with Jesus, and to fill up that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, and to be made conformable into His image! Philippians 3:8-10 says, “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered [here’s that word—suffering!] the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”

Paul knew what it was to suffer loss, and he didn’t blame anyone. He was glorying in his suffering, and doing it gladly for Jesus’ sake. He got a glimpse of the importance of sufferings, and how they would in this life, bring him closer to Jesus. So, run to the Lord Jesus Christ in the time of your suffering.

### **3. It causes us to recognize the presence of God in every step**

Jesus said, “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*” The pure in heart; those who have had their hearts redeemed, and have had their hearts cleansed, and made righteous through the blood of Jesus. Their hearts are free, and when trouble comes their way, they can respond to it in a godly way. They can see God in it, and learn to recognize God in each step on the anguish, and understand that God’s purposes are being worked out in this situation. In society, you meet many people who are greatly embittered about something that has happened in their lives. My wife had a cousin who had a couple of fingers cut off in a saw, and it was somebody else’s carelessness that caused it. It seems to this day he’s bitter about it—and because of his bitterness, the fruit is not right in his life.

If you can bow your heart to the sovereignty of God, and recognize that this all-wise, all-knowing God is looking down on the universe, and that He’s cares about what I’m going through, and that He sees what I’m experiencing, and He is allowing this tribulation to happen, then you are a blessed person!! Do you know any people that see God in their trials? They’re the sweetest people on earth, aren’t they? They drip with honey! If you want to be an attraction to the world, and to those who don’t know Christ, then begin to face your suffering this way. Start crying out to God, that you would recognize Him in all of your trials and tribulations that come your way. You’ll be the envy of those around you. No one is attracted to the bitter, shriveled-up soul that is complaining about his problems, or bitter that the whole world’s against him. But if you start recognizing God in the trials that come your way, be they training your children, forming a new church, or whatever they may be, your heart will change, and those around you will know it. God will truly be glorified in your life.

### **4. Suffering should soften our hearts so that we would have a tender heart towards others who suffer**

When we see others in their hour of trial, in their hour of anguish, our suffering should lead us to have compassion towards them. There are so many going through poverty, physical pain, spiritual pain, or problems with loved ones. The apostle Paul said in II Corinthians 4:7-11 “*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*”

God wants to be constantly in a place of undoneness. I marvel many times at the first words out of Jesus’ mouth when he was about to preach the greatest sermon ever preached: “*Blessed [happy, or to be envied] are the poor in spirit.*” Those who are humble, who have a sense of undoneness about them, “*have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the power may be of God, and not of us.*” Understand, that in our tribulations, that God is keeping us at a place of

undone. Being in this state will better enable us to be others-centered, instead of self-centered.

*“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed...”*

Why not distressed? Because Paul saw God in the picture! He saw God brooding over him in the midst of difficulty. He made it a habit to run to his heavenly Father. He saw an opportunity to share in Jesus’ sufferings.

*“We are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.”*

Here again, Paul is simply finding another way to say that “tribulation worketh.” It does a good thing in your heart, in making you dependent upon God.

Brothers and sisters, if your life is moving along in unhindered prosperity, you should tremble. You should cry out to God, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in your body, instead of depending upon your ability and your own goodness to get by in the Christian life. You need daily to have in your life the attitude that says, “I cannot do this on my own. God, I must have you. I will utterly fail in my own strength.”

Paul says, *“We preach Christ.”* Is that where he stopped? I’ve heard it many times today, “Preach Christ! Don’t preach anything but Jesus Christ!” Is that where it stops? Paul says, *“We preach Christ crucified.”* We preach a suffering gospel. We preach that *“tribulation worketh.”* We preach that it’s okay to have a financial setback. That doesn’t mean that God is against you! There’s a lot to ponder when we think of preaching *“Christ crucified.”* It reminds us that we need to have a life dead to self, and that we need to welcome suffering, and have our lives daily placed on the altar, and never being satisfied with where you are. We would never have found pardon, or have known redemption, if it wouldn’t be for the suffering of Christ, and His clothing Himself in human flesh. We would have no hope, if it weren’t for *“Christ crucified.”*

Sorrow, tribulation and anguish are among many of the ways that we suffer, and thereby are weaned from ourselves. In redemption, God does a wonderful work in our hearts. He gives a new heart, and new desires, and somehow, despite it all, there can come a complacency, a satisfaction that’s not right.

I’m concerned about the way our country approaches persecution and suffering—the Charismatic seems to say that God doesn’t want us to suffer, or to be sick; many seek to cause the church to be angry and up in arms about the rampant persecution in other parts of the world, and to get involved politically to help stop such persecution, and to make sure that no one has to go through persecution. After all, don’t we have a right to believe what we wish without persecution? But the apostle Paul seemed to think differently. There seems to be a resignation and an acceptance of persecution, with the underlying thought of “You need tribulation in your life.” Don’t run from tribulation. Don’t believe God’s main goal is to free us from difficulty here on earth.

In closing, here’s what the Bible says tribulation worketh in us. Romans 5:3-5 *...tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*

And when that hope is shed abroad in our hearts, we can have boldness. However this boldness, when coming through the avenue of tribulation, is not an arrogant boldness, brothers and sisters. Rather, it’s a quiet and a joyful boldness that remains undaunted in the face of whatever comes its way. It’s a boldness and a confidence that comes only because *“I know in whom I have believed.”* Our confidence rests fully and wholly in Christ. The confidence in our flesh is stripped from us. The temptation to glory in a spiritual conquest, if the conquest comes through tribulation, is replaced by a knowing in our heart that all glory belongs to God, and none to ourselves.

In the passage, patience is followed by experience. It's not something that's mere empty theology in our minds, but rather something that gets worked out in the everyday workings of our lives. We're talking about the workplace, the home—places where difficulties and trials can be such that we have to often run to our heavenly Father. It's here where patience is developed, when an immediate crisis forces us to choose between reacting in a godly way and “flying off the handle”. There's the excuse that is given so many times: “It happened so fast that I didn't even have time to think!” But at a time like that, you can have righteous responses, and later look back at the incident and say, “Praise God! Tribulation is working in my life.”

I want to share a past experience that taught me an important truth regarding tribulation. Years ago I was nominated as a deacon. Earlier that same day (the selection service was in the evening), I once again separated my shoulder badly—the same one I had injured when I was seventeen. The shoulder wouldn't pop back into place by itself, so I had to spend time at the chiropractor to put it back into place. By the time the evening had arrived, I was a pretty broken man—the possibility of me being ordained hadn't even crossed my mind. I was simply bowing my heart to the physical pain, choosing to see God in it and allowing Him to work. When they said my name, I was shocked, but understood at the same time that God uses broken vessels, and that He wants to use those who don't have confidence in themselves. Even with the numerous physical ailments I've endured over the years, I can rejoice and look back at the last ten years with a real understanding of God's mercy in my life. Those physical trials have kept me from going back to my proud, arrogant ways.

In closing I say to you again that “tribulation worketh” a good work in your heart. Don't despise it.

*This booklet was transcribed from a message given by Dean Stump on July 30, 2006, at Living Hope Christian Fellowship. Transcribed and adapted by Mark Bankston, 2006.*

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