

# "Why Are Ye Troubled?"

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"Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?" (Luke 24:38).

This question was addressed to a few men and women assembled under very peculiar circumstances, and in the midst of a great crisis. It was no new question even then, for trouble had troubled people long before, and the same question might have been asked all down through the ages, as it can be today. But it gathers new significance from the Questioner. The fact that it is Christ who asks, "Why are ye troubled?" lends an additional importance to this ever-present and ever-pressing question.

Why are ye *troubled*? Might not that question be addressed to everyone at some time or other? Is it not of universal application? Scarcely is it ever an irrelevant question to any of us. The other day, a revolution occurred in Russia which overthrew the existing regime and deprived the Tsar of his power and position. When he was informed of what had happened, he is said to have thanked God. And why? It is reported that a little more than a month before, when one of his ministers commiserated him on his tired appearance, he exclaimed, "Yes, I have long been *sick and tired of everything*."

"Sick and tired of everything!" And yet he was, perhaps, the wealthiest and most absolute monarch in the world, possessing so many estates that some of the houses he owns he has never slept in, and with stables full of horses he has never used!

Nor was the Tsar alone in his weariness. Many others, possessing all that this world can give, are sick and tired. The world cannot give peace; it cannot shelter us from trouble; our hearts are a prey to a disorder for which there is no panacea anywhere, except in Him who said, "In Me ye shall have peace."

But let us change the emphasis: "Why are ye troubled?" What particular form does it take in your case? Trouble assumes some terrible forms today, and there are sufferers who think there is no relief. A mother wrote to us, the other day, with respect to the loss of her *only* son, a fine, promising young man, killed at the front: "Many thanks for your kind letters of sympathy and books. We have received a most terrible blow in the loss of our darling boy, and life will never be the same for us again. I suppose time will heal our wounds, but nothing anyone can say seems to bring any comfort, because it cannot bring dear \_\_\_\_\_ back to us."

Now, Christ does not say to *such*, "Why are ye troubled?" as though He did not expect them to feel their loss. Those to whom He originally addressed His question, as a matter of fact, had no need to be troubled, but He knows equally well that many have abundant cause to feel almost crushed by the weight of their sorrow. Trials are of various kinds, and some go very deep. We cannot deal with all of them like those British tars, who were saved from the "Laurentic" some time ago, did with theirs. She was sunk by a mine during last winter, in extremely cold weather, and the sailors lost all their belongings, besides being exposed to extreme hardship. A relief expedition was organized, and the men were brought to a large hall. "A piano was in the room when the men arrived, and although dripping wet, hungry and cold, one of the sailors went over to the instrument and commenced to play 'Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag, and smile, smile, smile.'" Now this is the world's way, and it is *one* way of meeting certain troubles: to make the least of them and to smile. There is a danger sometimes of magnifying our trials through self-consciousness and self-absorption. But as we have said,

there are trials which go deep and which no earthly music can charm and no smiles can alleviate. They seem fixed, tied like a heavy weight to the heart. And yet we ought, if we are believers in Christ, to be able to smile *in* them, and in spite of them, and not be like that English king of whom it is said that when the news came of his son having been drowned at sea, he never smiled again. That mother, from whose letter we have quoted, may indeed never find life the same again, but the reason she did not find any comfort is explained in her own words: "Nothing anyone can say can bring dear \_\_\_\_\_ back to us." She was occupied with the loss, instead of looking to God to bring gain out of the loss. There may be others who regard their losses or bereavements from that standpoint. Things can never be what they once were, and therefore they refuse to be comforted. Is not this to look at things too exclusively from one point of view? Is a lifelong feud to be kept up between us and God? Is what He has permitted to be allowed to darken our whole life and sever us from the only source of real help? Are we thus to miss the lesson which sorrow is designed to teach and be deprived of the blessing which grief, even of such a poignant nature, can yield?

The following sweet story comes from the trenches: "A boy who had seen his brother's body broken before his eyes," wrote a chaplain at the front in the summer of 1915, after his brigade had been through an absolute inferno, "crept back into his dugout and fixed a little drawing on its wall. He drew a cross and a sunrise and wrote the simple inscription, 'God is love.'" A cross and a sunrise! The cross, the symbol of love, and the sunrise behind it telling us there is no darkness to the soul that trusts, and that all will yet be well. If only we entered more into the meaning of these words: "He that spared not His *own* Son, but delivered Him up for us all," we should see that the greatest sacrifice we are called on to make is small in comparison with the one He has made, and the thought that God's heart has sorrowed and bled for us would stop the bleeding of our own and heal the wounds, however deep.

Someone has finely said:

"It is one of the great secrets in life to make friends of our infirmities. If we fight them, they are very masterful. If we accept them, they have a strange way of leading us to surprises of compensation which the Lord has hid in His marvelous mines. I wonder how much of the later and richer revelations in the letters of the Apostle Paul might be traced to his acceptance of the thorn and to his making friends with his sore infirmity.

"And as it is with infirmity, so it is with all the forms of commonplace suffering. If we fight our sorrows, they add a cubit to their stature. Our antagonism feeds them. They suck their vigor from our resentment. And as they grow bigger in our eyes, they tend to make us bitter, and bitterness has very deadly issues. Sorrow, which is resented, assumes command of everything. On the other hand, accepted sorrow sweetens everything, for the surrendered will become the channel of grace.

"But the acceptance must not be an act of despair, a surrender to the hands of cold and indifferent fate. It must be an act of faith, a surrender to the gracious hands of the living God. We must accept our sorrow at His hands, and when the acceptance is made, the sorrow is transfigured. 'If this cup may not pass from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.' 'There appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him.'"

But there are other forms of trouble. Someone may feel outcast and alone, or the sense of having been wronged may be eating like a canker into the life. God's Word gives us such a picture in Hagar, long ago. She was sent away and deprived of all place and interest in Abraham's household. She wanders off, and at length the water is spent in the bottle, and "she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept." What a dreary prospect! She might well have said, Life will never be the same to me again. She was ready to think that all was over and to give herself up to despair.

But what happens? "The angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar?" The same voice was speaking to her that afterwards spoke to the disciples and said, Why are ye troubled? And so it would speak now to everyone in like circumstances. Did not the very question addressed to Hagar come as a reminder that there was One who knew all about her and felt an interest in her? Yes, there is One who knows us and knows all about us, however little we may know Him. And mark how He comforts: "Arise, lift up the lad, and *hold him in thine hand.*" As much as to say, "See, he is yours still, though you thought you were to lose him." It was an act of faith, and God always requires an act of faith before He blesses. And do not the words, "Hold him in thine hand," carry our minds on again to that scene in the upper room? We hear the same voice and the same language there. "Handle Me and see" are the words with which the Lord comforts the downcast hearts of His disciples.

"Hold him in thine hand": "Handle Me and see." Is there not a lesson here? We are afraid often to look at our troubles, and they hover like specters around and over us. If we would only grasp them and look at them intently, not only might they appear less ominous, but we should see another form behind them, and we should hear a voice speaking out of the cloud, "Handle Me and see." As those disciples did so, their trouble ceased, and their joy knew no bounds — it was **Christ!** They had recovered all. Why has God allowed your grief, your loneliness, your loss? That you may find Christ. That out of the gloomy shadow He may arise as a bright reality. If you are afraid of your grief, you will be its slave and live in fear of it all your days. Grasp it, look at it, hold it in your hand, and you will find God in it, and it will yield you a blessing of which you had never dreamed.

So it was with Hagar. "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; *for I will make him a great nation,*" God says to her. "Look at him. He is not going to die and disappear, as you suppose, but instead, not only shall he live, but from him shall come a multitude of others." "Hold him in thine hand." What a message to every troubled heart those words contain! Already to Hagar her child was as good as dead — she saw only the specter of death. As she held him in her hands and gazed with all a mother's love upon him, how changed the spectacle; instead of the child upon whom her heart doted dying under a shrub, she sees a great nation. Instead of the loss of one, there is the gain of many.

"Ah," you say, "that can never happen to me. My boy *is* dead. He is gone from me and will never come back." Ask, then, that God will do for you what He did for that outcast, forlorn woman of whom we are thinking: "God *opened her eyes,* and she saw *a well of water.*" All you need is opened eyes. He who can make even the desert yield the means of refreshment

and life can turn to account your great grief and make it an eternal gain.

*"From vintages of sorrow are deepest joys distilled,  
And the cup outstretched for healing is oft at Marah filled:  
God leads to joy through weeping; to quietness through strife;  
Through yielding unto conquest; through death to endless life;  
Be still! He hath enrolled thee for the kingdom and the crown;  
Be silent! let Him mold thee, who calleth thee His own."*

"Be silent to God and let Him *mould* thee" (Ps 37:7; author's translation). Herein lies the great secret of suffering — it has a purpose. God has a work to do in His people — He is molding them. And suffering is the furnace to purify, the sharp edge of the chisel and the blow of the hammer which are producing the fair outline which God is seeking to produce.

"The story is told of a young and struggling sculptor in Paris, who, fired with some inward vision of beauty, set forth to embody the same in clay. By the time the beautiful figure stood complete, his resources were gone, and midwinter was upon him. The nights grew colder and colder, and his attic in the roof was little better than the open air. What would happen if the frost struck in and penetrated the plaster and split into pieces all his patient labor? A new night came on, bitterer than any before, but he had no fire and could not afford one. What was he to do? It had become a choice between him and his art. Taking off his poor coat, he wrapped it closely around the 'sole heir of his invention,' and so he laid down on the floor by its side. The next day they found him stiff and dead. But the warmth he had foregone had saved his statue, whose life he had put before his own."

When we see how much a man is ready to endure in order that the image he has created may be preserved, shall we not be ready to suffer, in order that God may perfect His image in us? Supposing that young sculptor, instead of acting as he did, had in a despairing or petulant mood taken a hammer and smashed his work to pieces! Yet is not this what many in their thoughtlessness are attempting to do with God's work? "It is God which worketh *in* you," we read, "to will and to do of His good pleasure," and we rebel against His will, or think it all a mistake, and will look at nothing but the loss and the blank, instead of trying to discover the blessing. Sorrow enhances the sweetness of life and deepens its peace:

*"The half of music, I have heard men say,  
Is to have grieved."*

We heard, the other day, of one who had to endure the pain and the loss of having his leg amputated. He told someone, after it was all over, He had given to him such a vision of the Lord that he was almost ready, in order to have such an experience again, to go through the ordeal once more. It has been well said that "whoso suffers most has most to give." If only we would recognize what sorrow can do for ourselves and enable us to do for others, we should rather be ready to welcome it than repine.

*"Measure thy life by loss and not by gain,  
Not by the wine drunk, but the wine poured out;  
For love's strength standeth in love's sacrifice,*

*And whoso suffers most has most to give."*

Do not persist in looking at your trouble as a dark specter. "Hold it in thine hand," "handle it and see," and you will discover it is not a specter but a friend.

*Why are ye troubled?* Are you waiting for some deliverance, some help, which does not come? This, too, has its lesson. God's blessings are so good that they take time to prepare. "It is *good* that a man should both hope and *quietly wait* for the salvation of the Lord." Help did not come to Hagar until the last moment. The water was spent in the bottle, the child appeared about to die, and no prospect of deliverance seemed at hand, but all this was but the preparation of the ground before God could act. He must make room for Himself or we should not see Him. We are deprived of everything in order to see that the deliverance which comes is really His work, and thus He makes Himself seen and known.

*"God the strong, God the beneficent,  
God ever mindful in all strife and strait,  
Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,  
Till at last He puts forth might and saves."*

"Why are ye troubled?" Is it the strife of tongues? Have friends turned into foes? Have the nearest forsaken you? What comfort may be derived from some of the psalms in these situations! What a promise is contained in Psalm 31:20. "*Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy presence from the pride of man: Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.*" Again, in Psalm 27, the psalmist refers to enemies coming upon him, to a host encamping against him, and to war, but his confidence is unshaken, and he says, "My heart shall not fear." And the reason is because he is continually living in the presence of God and desires only one thing — to behold the beauty of the Lord and to dwell in His house. "In the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion: in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me." Yes, in "all strife and strait" we may trust God for help, even though we may have to feel the deepest distress of all: "When my father and my mother forsake me." Will God fail us then? No. "Then the Lord will take me up" (vs. 10).

Are you troubled because people have failed you, or turned out differently from what you expected? Christ says, "Handle Me and see." He will never give way beneath your touch. He will never fail you. The more you handle Him, the more you will discover His worth.

*Or is it the dark specter of doubt which troubles you?* Have you doubts as to God? Do you sometimes question His goodness and wonder if He cares? Are you inclined at times to abandon yourself to the passing world and live only for the present? Does not Christ's question meet that, too? "*Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?*" Those thoughts! How they trouble you, and what a dark shadow they cast across your life! But Christ has a remedy for all this. "Handle Me, and see," He says. "I am not insubstantial or unreal. I am flesh and bones. Handle me. I am not afraid that you should touch Me or come near to Me. I became flesh that you might know Me, and in knowing Me you might know all truth." If only you would take firm hold of Christ, all would be well. It is because our grasp is feeble, as if all were unreal, that we find no satisfaction. Hold your doubts in your hand and look at them closely, and you will see how foolish they are. And then lay hold of Christ, and you

will find how real He is, and that His cross, towering amid the gloom, makes all darkness light and solves all questions. Doubt is like the nettle and stings only when you touch it lightly; grasp it firmly and look at it in the presence of Christ, and its sting is unfelt.

The one cure for sorrow of every kind is a vision of Christ. "Handle Me, and see." Only let your sorrow drive you to Him, and all will be well. He will "shine through the gloom," for He who says to you, "Why are ye troubled?" had once Himself to say, "My soul *is exceeding sorrowful even unto death.*"

Those words of old John Newton may well become a prayer upon many a lip today:

*"Quiet, Lord, my froward heart;  
Make me teachable and mild,  
Upright, simple, free from art;  
Make me as a little child —  
From distrust and envy free,  
Pleased with all that pleases Thee.  
"What Thou shalt today provide,  
Let me as a child receive;  
What tomorrow may betide,  
Calmly to Thy wisdom leave;  
'Tis enough that Thou wilt care —  
Why should I the burden bear?  
"As a little child relies  
On a care beyond his own,  
Knows he's neither strong nor wise,  
Fears to stir a step alone —  
Let me thus with Thee abide,  
As my Father, Guard and Guide."*

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*Angels in White — OR — Words to the Worried. P. 249*