



Trials – April 5, 2018

Verses Covered

Genesis 50:19 – 21

2 Corinthians 1:3 – 4

Colossians 1:24

Ephesians 2:4 – 7

James 1:2 – 4

Romans 5:1 – 4

Genesis 15:13 – 14

Revelation 2:9 - 10

Habakkuk 1:2 – 4, 13

Romans 8:26 – 28

1 John 4:16 - 19

OK. We're going to start today in Genesis 50:19 – 21. I want to talk to you today about trials. What their purpose is in your life, what the benefits are, and how you address them. Everybody faces them at some time in their life. They are exceptionally difficult. It's fairly obvious; God's sovereign. You have a difficult Biblical concept of the world because in the Bible it says two things. It says that God is sovereign over the universe, but that Satan rules this world. So you're going to deal with the fact that you live behind enemy lines. So there are certain things that are going to happen to you that are natural outflow of sinful decay. The older you get; the more things don't work on you. You can't walk as far. You don't heal as quickly. So there are normal repercussions from living in a broken world that are obviously repaired when we die. But there are other things that come to you that come through the hand of God. And let me just define a trial for you. I have a real simple definition. If it makes you unhappy, it's a trial. Now there is a difference between happiness and joy. Joy is what happens when you live for the glory of Christ. That's the driving passion in your life and joy comes when that's fulfilled. Happiness is a good circumstance. So when you have a bad circumstance in your life, if you have anything that takes away your happiness, that's a trial. If it doesn't take away your happiness, it's not a trial.

So we're going to walk through the scripture and look briefly at what it says. But if you remember Joseph, this guy went through just horror. I mean he's a little kid, of course he's a brat. He's a little mouthy to his brothers and his dad. They're shocked at the dream he tells them. They get a chance, they think, "Let's just kill him." One of the brothers says, "No, let's put him in a pit hoping he'll save himself." Caravan comes by, they sell him to the Egyptians. So here's this little

kid, he's sold off, he has no idea of the language, no idea of the culture. He's going in a land where he's the only person that believes in Jehovah. Everybody else believes in the Egyptian gods, a number of them. As a matter of fact, when you do the plagues, virtually every plague was against one of the Egyptian gods. So they had a number of gods. Joseph, the only guy there that believes what he believes, so he has nowhere to worship; he has nowhere to go. But he begins to climb the ladder, gets in Potiphar's house. The cougar in the house goes after him. He refuses her. She blames him. He goes to jail. He's in there, he meets a couple guys, hope he'll get out, but he doesn't. Finally, he gets out and everything works fine. But he went through literally a lifetime of misery. And even as the second in charge in Egypt, before he gets his family there, he has no one to eat dinner with, because if you remember there's a weird little verse in Genesis that says the Egyptians loathed shepherds. He was a shepherd; his family were shepherds. That's why they put him in that land of Goshen. Kind of stuck him off. Good land, but wouldn't let them anywhere else in Egypt. So he really has virtually no religious stuff, he has no people that he really can hang out with. So his existence, even though he's the second most powerful man, is pretty debilitating. He meets his brothers and then finally this is what he says. Look at this.

¹⁹But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? ²⁰As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

Now I want you to notice what he says. OK. He says God did this not for me, but for others, mainly the family, to get them into Egypt. So sometimes the trials that come into your life are not to make you better or bless you or do anything for you. Sometimes the trials that come into your life are to effect other people in the kingdom. So you've got to accept that. It's a difficult thing because we always want something that blesses us because unfortunately as Americans, we've become a little self-centered in our theology. But what the scripture would say is, all that he went through wasn't for him, but for everybody else.

Now look at 2 Corinthians 1:3 – 4. Slide over to the New Testament. It says:

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Again, He's going to comfort you in this. One of the purposes of you running through a trial is so He can comfort you so He can use you to help other people achieve that same comfort. So again, it's a little bit for you, but it's also a connection to blessing others in your life. So He's going to allow you to go through some trials so He can show you He can handle it. So you can encourage others to do the same thing.

Now look at Colossians 1:24. It's another thing you're doing that is difficult to understand exactly. But again this is not about you. Look at this.

²⁴Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

Hang there with me for a second. And then look at Ephesians 2:4 – 7. Listen to what he says:

⁴But God being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places,

Now watch this,

⁷so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Now you stay there, but let me read you the first chapter of Job. Satan's talking to God:

⁷The Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." ⁸The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." ⁹Then Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰Have You not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

¹²Then the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord.

Now you put all these three together. He says that there is something lacking in the sufferings of Christ. He's not finished suffering. I finish it. In the coming ages, not right now, in the coming ages when all this is finished, you have justification, right. We talked about that. Sanctification where we are now. You have glorification where God redeems everything. In glorification He shows us off. You get a picture of that in Job 1 where God looks at Satan and says, "You've seen Job? He loves me. It doesn't matter what you do to him." Satan says, "Well, let's see." God said, "OK." Job stands the test. In the coming ages how we handle sufferings is how God will brag about us in glorification. We've been justified. Our sanctification is the basis of His bragging in glorification.

Now who does He show us off to? I have no idea. What does that mean? I have no idea. The Bible does not address it, but it is an interesting concept. So when you go through suffering, sometimes it's not about you and it's not about now. So you have to take, when you go through a really difficult trial, you have to take a long term picture, that it may not be about you and it's not about now. So the trials are a difficult concept to master. And this is what happens.

Now there are some benefits that come now. Look at James 1:2 – 4. Now listen to what he says:

²Count it all joy, my brothers,

Now listen to what he just said. Count it joy. It's not. If it is, you don't have to count it that way. You think about it as joy. What is joy? When I fulfil the glory of Christ. Even if I don't understand why I'm suffering right now, it's not for me, I'm finishing the sufferings of Christ. It's going to be demonstrated in eternity. If those things are true, even though I don't understand what's happening, I can consider it joy if I connect it to these two things. So that it's not about me and it's not about this time. So I can connect it if, though, I hang in there and I connect that. There are certain benefits that will come. So I think about joy because God's going to do something with my life. When you meet trials of various kinds, there is no definition of trial, except what I've given you. There are all sorts of different trials. Anything that takes away your happiness. You have a lost bank account, you find out you're overdrawn, all the way to the loss of a child. It doesn't matter. Now he says,

³knowing that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴Let steadfastness have its full effect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

This is actually the Greek word, *hupomoné*, which is endurance. This means to stand under something. So the idea is if I stand under the trial, if I stay in the trial, count it joy, and I stand under it, that will make me mature and complete. So obviously if I don't go through trials and I don't handle them correctly, I don't reach maturity and completion. I don't reach maturity. I don't get completed in Christ. These things come out of steadfastness which comes out of my ability to say, "You know, God, even if I'm just filling up the sufferings of your son and it's going to be something you brag about one day and it's not about me, I'm going to consider it joy. And therefore these things will be put into my life." Now trials are the only way to do that. So I'm telling you, you're not going to become mature and complete by reading the Bible. Reading the Bible enables you to know what to do when you hit here so that you can hang in there and it's result can be a maturity and a completion.

Now look at Romans 5. He argues the same thing which is interesting because these two disagree, or seem to disagree. Now listen to this.

¹We've been justified with faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

That's not internal peace, it's that you and God are now OK.

²through Him we've also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand; rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³Therefore, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that sufferings produce endurance; ⁴endurance produces character, character produces hope.

Now look at what he says. You've got endurance, you've got character, and then he says hope. This is the key word. He talks about endurance. I hang in there. It produces character. It makes me better. It reorients my compass better and better toward Jesus. And then it settles my faith. Hope is never in the Bible. What the Aggies spent \$75 million for over 10 years, fully guaranteed before the man ever coached a practice, and that is, they hope that they will one day beat Alabama and win a national championship. That hope is vain. It is empty. It's never going to happen. It's forlorn. Hope deferred makes the heart sick. I feel for the Aggies, but that's the reality of life. Do not use the Aggie definition of hope for the Bible definition of hope. The Bible definition of

hope is something you don't have yet, but you will. So it builds endurance and the trials build character and they actually bring your faith to a point where you go, "You know what, God's pulled me through all of this stuff, He's got me." So those are the benefits.

Now we don't have time to go there but in Proverbs 17, Psalm 60, Psalm 66, they both talk about refining; that God refines you like silver. Now I'm not a scientist by any stretch of the imagination, but I do know this. All metals melt at a different temperature. So you've got a rock with a bunch of different metals in it, you find the temperature at which silver melts, you heat that rock up and the silver pours out, that's always the metaphor in the scripture. That God heats your life up to pull the best out of you that He can. It's always this picture of a crucible. So God's going to put some heat in your life.

Now fly with me. Look at Genesis 15:13. In the middle of all this, God controls the edges. It's my best thing. God controls the edges in trials. Listen to what he says in Genesis 15:13.

¹³Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain your offspring will be sojourners

Now that's a trial. Sojourner means you're in a land that isn't yours. So they're going to be in Egypt.

In a land that is not theirs and will be servants there.

There's the trial.

And they will be afflicted,

There's the deal.

for 400 years. ¹⁴But I will bring judgment on the nation they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

Genesis 15:13 – 14, God controls the time that they're going to be in the trial. They're going to be in there for 400 years. But He's in control of that. The trials, the time of your trial, the length of it, the severity of it, the depth of it, is in God's control.

Look at Revelation 2. There were seven churches. He wrote to only; two were really good. Smyrna was the best. It's interesting the metaphor here, Smyrna is actually the Greek word for myrrh, which is used for obviously part of the death blessing. Look in verse 9.

⁹I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Again, here's the deal. He says, "Don't be afraid, the devil is coming after you. But I've limited what he can do to you." You have the same position in Job 1. We won't look at it, but remember in Job, God limits what Satan is allowed to do to Job. So you have this time limitation and you God, even though He allows these in, He controls the timeframe and the depth of the suffering.

Now how do you face it? Go to Habakkuk. I preached at seminary yesterday and talking with various people before we go out and they have a college now at Southwestern. As a matter of fact, one of our former staff members, who was great, whose son is now on our staff, Wes. Mike is the Dean of the college and this week they had a young married couple in the college that had a one-year-old son drown in the bathtub. Now how do you face that? Now here's the difficulty you face. Look at Habakkuk 1:2 – 4. Now I want you to notice something here.

²O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear? Or cry to you, "Violence!" And you will not save. ³Why do you make me see iniquity and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. ⁴So the law is paralyzed and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.

Now Habakkuk is asking God why He has not judged Israel because Israel is filthy. Now I want you to notice something here. God does not, the Lord's answer, verse 5.

⁵"Look among the nations and see.

He does not condemn Habakkuk for the question. So one of the things you have a right to do in trial, when you flat don't understand it, you have the right to ask God, "Why?" I used to hear growing up, "Boy you don't ask God why." Listen! I don't think God has any problem with a single question you ask Him. Attitude maybe, but not questions. And so Habakkuk asked this question. God has no problem. Now here's where we get into a little issue. He gives him an answer in verses 5 & 6.

⁵"Well look among the nations and see! Wonder and be astounded! I'm doing the work in your days – that you would not believe if told. ⁶For behold, I'm raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own.

So His answer is, "I've got this. I'm fixing to punish you people. They're coming." So yeah, it doesn't look like I'm doing anything, but I've actually already been at work. Which kind of God's way of saying, "You know, I had this way before you asked something." Then you have Habakkuk's second question. Look in 1:13.

¹³You who are of pure eyes to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent? When the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

He says, "OK, God, I got the Chaldeans are coming, but here's my problem. They're worse than we are. We're bad, but they're really bad. So why are you letting the really bad people conquer the bad people?" To which God gives him no answer. So my point of that is this. You can ask

God whatever you want in the trial. There will be times He will answer you. Joseph, at the end of his life, knew why he'd gone through everything he went through. Now he didn't know it until toward the end, but he knew it. There will be other times when you are not going to get an answer. So you're going to have to live with that. So there are times you can trust what God tells you and times you have to trust His heart and His hand whether He tells you anything or not.

Now here's how you're going to face it. That's one thing. Go to Romans 8:26 – 28. This is one of those great verses of how you're going to get through this. He says:

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷and He who searches hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

And then the Baptist verse.

²⁸And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.

So I know everything's going to work out OK. Why? Because when I can't pray, the Holy Spirit prays for me on His own. This is not a private prayer language. It's nothing about you praying. It's that when you don't know how to pray and you are struggling and you are whipped, the Holy Spirit in you prays for you on His own. He prays according to the will of God. Remember we talked about intercessory prayer. God hears His prayer, honors prayer, and Romans 8, somehow all things work together for good. So somewhere out here something good's coming out of it. It may be eternity. That's not the problem. But something good will come out of whatever you're going through. And the reason you know that is because the Holy Spirit's praying for you. Even when you can't.

Now one last thing. Go to 1 John 4:16 - 19.

¹⁶So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷By this, His love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, also are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, for fear has to do with punishment, whoever fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹We love, because He first loved us.

This is always the problem you face. At some point when people go through a wicked trial, they'll come in and the first thing the enemy will say to them is, "Boy! You did something wrong." There is never punishment in the life of a Christian. Why? Jesus took it on the cross. There is discipline, but never punishment. His love for you is, He says, perfect. And that means two things. It means non-conditional and no degrees. It's non-conditional. There's nothing you can do today to make Him love you more than tomorrow, or less than tomorrow. There are no degrees to it. It's always the same for everybody. His love is perfect. The enemy will make you think if He loved you, you would not be going through this. So you're going to have to lock these scriptures away. He may

answer you; probably won't. Romans 8; when you can't handle it, the Holy Spirit is going to pray for you. 1 John 4; He is always in love with you. That never stops. And if you know that He loves you, then you know, and if you know He does that, then you know all these other things are going to be true. That the benefit for you may not be in this world. It may be in the world to come. It is difficult. There again, there are various kinds of trials and the theodicy question is always difficult, "Why would God allow me to go through this?" I'm watching one of my best friends in the church that I've deer hunted with for years, spent a lot of time with, I'm watching him slowly get to the point where he can't walk. And it's horrible for me to watch. I don't understand why. This guy's been one of the most spiritual men I've ever known. If I needed prayer, he would be the first one I go to. I mean, there's nothing in his life that merits what's happening to him. My only ability to grasp it and deal with it is that God controls the edges and that sometimes, it's not for here, it's for later. And that's the only way I can handle it. I don't know how he does it. So this is a hard thing. I think, and this is why I hate Satan, because when you're really struggling, is when he jumps on you with both feet. So it's difficult.

Questions

Q. How do you go about explaining this concept to a new believer. Because they're going through so hard of a trial and Satan's really attacking them.

A. Yeah, I think the only way to explain to a new believer is honestly walk them through the scripture. I don't know what else you can do. Certainly lost people are never going to be on this level with you. And it's difficult for Christians to deal with this. I mean I can't tell you over the years how many times I've seen Christians leave, I lost a best friend that I bow hunted with, out of the state, we spent a lot of time together, they had a grandchild that was born with some issues. And I go over to the house and the only reason they let me in the house is because I was friends of the family. But they never came back to church but once. Never came back after that. They were livid with God; that He allowed this to happen to their grandchild. And I think that's the difficulty. I think it really boils down to this. You either believe what the scripture says about what God thinks and why He handles trials, or you don't. Because you're going to hit them. You live long enough, if you married, sooner or later one of you is burying the other one. Unless you die together like that goofy movie, The Notebook. And then they lie and one of them comes back in the next one. So I ruined the day for y'all, I'm sure. But other than that goofy show, at some point you're going to go through something.

Q. Is there anything you can say to a non-Christian who looks at your life and says, "So you believe in God and He's letting all these things happen to you. And you're a good Christian so how come?"

A. Yeah, I think that's the best question I can get from a non-believer. If he looks at me and says, "God's letting these things happen to you and you're a good person, how come." My response is "Because I live in the same world you do and it's broken. But the difference between me and you is, He's going to do something really good in my life here and later that you don't get to have. I would say it sweetly. Maybe not quite like that. You're going to hell and I'm not. I'd say I a little sweeter than that, but I would let them know I

have two benefits. I have something when I die and He's going to walk me through it today and you don't have that.

Q. I think if you say, "You have it." It will be obvious that they don't have it.

A. Yeah, actually most people don't think they are today, obviously. Hell's kind of gone the way of the deviled ham Satan. Everybody kind of mocks that. But it's a true concept.