*Introduction*

Last week we looked at turning trials into triumphs. We stated that James said

***“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds”***. There was an expectancy that we would encounter diversity along life’s journey.

James gives us a number of ways in which we are to face these trials in our lives. He says:

Thank God for them,

Ask God about them and

Honour God in them.

As well as doing this, we, as Christians, need to understand what we mean by adversity and how do we respond to the question that so many pose when they face adversity or when we see disaster fall, like it did on Christchurch, New Zealand – “Where is God in all this?”

In order to cope with, deal with and grow in faith through adversity we need to have our own ‘theology’ if you like on the subject.

We cannot go through life just blindly saying “God is in control” or have an “I don’t need to understand why these things happen, they just do” type attitude.

We need to have an understanding of what we believe, otherwise we become like sheep following one another and saying “I believe it because he told me, or they believe it”

Although I say we are going to get an understanding of why these things happen, actually we will not get all the way, because we will have to wait until we get home for the complete answer.

**Adversity**

The dictionary states that adversity is ‘hardship, difficulty, danger, misfortune’ and life provides many occasions when we experience these things, and sometimes the circumstances of life can be almost to much to bear, e.g. a broken marriage, a financial reverse, fierce persecution, the loss of a loved one, crippling infirmity or ill health and so on.

People and Christians, get confused on this matter of adversity and how to meet it. When wars rage on, famine is rife, vulnerable people suffer abuse and natural disasters strike, and they cry out “it all seems so senseless, so pointless, so devoid of meaning; where is God in all this?

Are we able to put the subject of adversity into a scriptural context to enable you to make sense of what is happening for yourself and for others.

There is no ultimate answer to this question of suffering but let me tell you a story that I hope will put it into some sort of context:

When Dr W Sangster, the great Methodist Preacher was a boy, he was sent on a 2 week camp. During the middle of the first week he almost ran out of money. He sent a telegram to his father, which read something like this: “SOS out of money, RSVP.”

No answer came, the second week began and slipped away, still no answer. His friends, noticing his preoccupation, said things like “Your dad has forgotten you are here”. One of his friends said to him “What do you think?” Sangster replied “I don’t know what to think, it’s all a mystery to me, but I’ll wait until I get home and he will tell me himself”

When he got home it was all explained. His father told him that, hard as it was for him not to respond, he saw this as one of the greatest opportunities his son could have to learn the value of money. Sangster never forgot it.

So we must keep in mind, and come to a place where we rest on the conviction “I’ll wait until I get home and He’ll tell me Himself”.

We must also remember that Jesus himself went through adversity, In Psalm 22:1 we read

***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?***

Our reading before us today states:

***ISA 40:31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.***

When adversity hits us, is it really possible for us to “run and not grow weary”. As a Christian the answer has got to be YES.

The writer of Proverbs states that there are things that he finds amazing, one of them is the eagle, he says ***PR 30:19 the way of an eagle in the sky,***

Turbulent winds cause the eagle to fly higher. There is tremendous lifting power in the thermal updrafts of turbulent winds.

These updrafts enable the eagle to reach great height from where it has a larger view of the terrain and a much greater perspective. The sharp eyes of the eagle are able to see much more.

The wing structure of an eagle enables it to cope with the strongest and stormiest winds. The feather structure prevents stalling, reduces turbulence and enables the eagle to experience a relatively smooth ride. But the most important thing we can learn from the eagle is this: no matter how fierce the storm, the eagle’s safety depends on the tilt of its wings.

When the storm strikes an eagle, the bird sets its wings in such a way that the air currents send it above the storm by their very fury. The stronger the storm, the higher the eagle rises. It is a parable. It is not the wind but the tilt of the wings that makes the difference.

We, as Christians can use the storms of life to soar above adversity, not on our own, but knowing the presence of God in every situation. The Psalmist writes

***PS 139:10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.***

The apostle Paul was no stranger to hardship and throughout the epistles he writes about much of what he has endured.

When writing to the Philippians he says

***PHP 1:12-14 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.***

As Christians we are not spared from the problems of life that come upon all people, but we can have an inner set of attitudes which will enable us to rise above the turbulence of life and ride out every storm.

What are these attitudes?

1. ***Accept the fact that Christians are not going to be exempt from the ordinary ills that afflict humanity.***

To have the attitude that “I am a Christian and God should treat me better” is fatal.

The Puritan Richard Baxter wrote of the great plague which swept through London:

*“at first it looked like so few religious people were taken away that they began to get puffed up and boast of the great differences which God did make. But quickly after that they all fell alike”.*

What difference does it make then, in being a Christian?

The difference is in the way a Christian is able to take whatever comes. Some are soured and some are sweetened by the same happening. Our own inner attitude can and will determine the results.

But, I hear you cry, the Psalmist says:

***PS 34:17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.***

***PS 34:19 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;***

This, surely is a clear promise that God’s people are precious to Him and He will intervene to end all their troubles.

Sometimes God does intervene to save His children in particular situations, but generally speaking the people of God have to face the same kind of adversities that fall upon the whole of humanity.

Suppose it should be guaranteed that troubles would always strike those opposed to God, what kind of world would this be?

I dread to think. Certainly not a dependable one. Its laws would always be in a process of suspension and all order would be gone.

For example, if a person leaned to far over a parapet then, providing he was a Christian, gravity would be suspended, and he would not fall. But if a non-Christian was to do that, gravity would pull him down to injury or even death.

God could have chosen to make the world and its laws like that, but God is a God of love and order. Because of this He is orderly and also dependable.

When He sees fit, He can intervene, and has done so in the past, e.g. He made iron swim. But we must understand that we are dealing not just with a God who is all-powerful but One who is also all-wise.

Whilst on this point we must also realize that IF God does intervene in a person’s life it should not be taken that it is a sign that God is pleased with that person, and when He does not, it is a sign that there is something wrong with them.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, deserted by men, and seemingly by His father, the crowed cried out ***“He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now”***.

If God had delivered him, maybe the crowd would have taken it that God was pleased with Him, but what they didn’t know was that God had a bigger plan.

It is along this line that the solution of suffering and adversity will be found; when God does not deliver it could be because He is doing something better.

1. ***We must understand that there is not always a direct casual relation between adversity and sin***

Some people believe that if something goes wrong it’s because they have sinned.

Well it has to be said that this is a world of moral consequence and that sin does bring trouble. But Jesus repudiated the idea that adversity and sin were always connected.

It was something that the religious people thought was the norm when they asked Jesus

***JN 9:1-2 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"***

Jesus’ answer puts this view right out of the window

***JN 9:3-5 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."***

We could also look at the life of Job to see this was not the case.

*Conclusion*

The circumstances of life, whether fortunate or unfortunate, good or bad, are neutral.

They simply are what they are; what matters is how we respond to them.

Good an evil in the moral sense do not reside in things, but always in people.

What matters is not so much what we suffer but how we react to what we suffer, knowing that as a Christian we are not on our own, but have one who has been there already:

***HEB 4:14-16 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*** AMEN