

God of My Life, to Thee I Call

William Cowper (1731–1800)

God of my life, to Thee I call;
Afflicted, at Thy feet I fall;
When the great water-floods prevail,
Leave not my trembling heart to fall.

Friend of the friendless and the faint,
Where should I lodge my deep complaint?
Where but with Thee, whose open door
Invites the helpless and the poor?

Did ever mourner plead with Thee
And Thou refuse that mourner's plea?
Does not the word still fixed remain
That none shall seek Thy face in vain?

That were a grief I could not bear,
Didst Thou not hear and answer prayer;
But a prayer-hearing, answering God
Supports me under every load.

Fair is the lot that's cast for me;
I have an Advocate with Thee.
They whom the world caresses most
Have no such privilege to boast.

Poor though I be, despised, forgot,
Yet God, my God, forgets me not;
And he is safe and must succeed
For whom the Lord vouchsafes to plead.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Tried with Fire: Teaching a Lesson

Kevin T. Bauder

It was the best day of his life. He had been blind from birth. One day as he sat begging he heard himself being discussed. Men were asking a rabbi whether the blindness was because of his sins or his parents' sin. The teacher replied that it was neither: instead, God wanted an opportunity to put His glory on display. Then the rabbi, whose name was Jesus, spit in the dirt, mixed up some mud, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," He said, "Wash in the pool of Siloam."

The man obeyed, and as he wiped the mud away sight flooded his eyes. For the first time he saw water. He saw the stone steps leading down to the pool. He saw the sky. As he returned from the pool he saw his neighbors. They refused to believe that he was really the same man, but he insisted that he was. Then they wanted an explanation.

The man gave a straightforward narration of the events. Perplexed, the neighbors took him to the Pharisees, but those religious experts became indignant because Jesus had healed him on the Sabbath. The Pharisees began to grill him about Jesus, hoping to get him to denounce the one who healed him. Instead, every question moved the man closer to faith in Jesus. Finally they pushed him too far, and the man retorted, "I've already answered you and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Would you also like to become his disciples?" (John 9:27).

That word *also* was significant. It meant that the man had made his choice. He couldn't have picked Jesus out of a crowd (a fact which quickly became evident). But the Pharisees had forced him to choose, and he chose to become a disciple of Jesus.

His reaction did not sit well with the Pharisees. At first they tried to deride and insult him, hoping to bully him into submission. The harder they badgered him, however, the more loyal the man became to Jesus. Frustrated, the Pharisees finally cast the man out of the synagogue (John 9:34).

Putting him out of the synagogue was a judicial act. Its effect was to mark the man as a renegade and to remove him from participation in the life of



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national Israel. Henceforth, he would be treated like a Gentile, not like a son of Abraham. It was the worst penalty that the Pharisees could legally inflict.

What had been the best day of his life was now the worst day of his life. It was at this juncture that Jesus re-inserted Himself into the conversation. First, He asked the (formerly) blind man whether he believed on Him, the Son of God. In response the man worshipped Him. Then Jesus turned on the Pharisees, accusing them of a kind of willful blindness for which they would be held accountable. Finally, Jesus told a parable that would redefine the situation in which the man found himself.

In His parable Jesus compared Israel to a sheep-fold. Inside the fold were both sheep that belonged to the shepherd (Jesus identified Himself as the shepherd) and sheep that did not belong to the shepherd. Jesus stated that His sheep knew His voice and that they would follow Him, while other sheep would run away. He further stated that He would lead His sheep “out” (John 10:1-5).

Out of what? Obviously, out of the fold—that is to say, out of Israel. The implication was that though the (formerly) blind man now found himself outside of Israel, his situation did not displease God. In fact, all of Jesus’ followers were going to be led out of Israel, constituting a flock following the shepherd.

Jesus went even further. He claimed that He also had sheep who had never been in the fold. This reference could only be to Gentile believers (John 10:16). Jesus stated that He would also lead these sheep, and that they would become one flock with the sheep who had left the fold.

The flock about which Jesus spoke is obviously the Church. The Church comprises believers who were once reckoned as Jews and believers who were once reckoned as Gentiles. In the one flock, however, they are neither. They are identified and held together by their mutual following of the shepherd. This teaching closely mirrors Paul’s analogy of the new humanity in Ephesians 2:10-22.

In John 10 Jesus taught an important lesson about the nature of the Church. In doing so, He wanted to use an object lesson. That object lesson involved a blind man who would be healed and then subjected to some bitter hours of recrimination. This man was already made to suffer for Jesus before he ever figured out who Jesus was. The suffering was real, but it had a point.

Sometimes God permits pain in the lives of His children because He intends to use them as object lessons. The man who was blind from birth is an example. Job is another. From Job’s point of view, his suffering was random and meaningless. From a transcendent point of view, however, God was teaching an important lesson, first to Satan, but then to others. Even today people are still learning from Job’s suffering.

God did much the same with the apostles. Paul wrote that the apostles were made a spectacle “to the world, and to angels, and to men” (1 Cor. 4:9). God allowed the apostles to look like fools. He allowed them to suffer weakness. He allowed them to be despised. He permitted them to be deprived of food, drink, clothing, and housing. He let them be beaten, and He made them labor with their own hands. They were insulted and defamed. They were treated like filth and the “offscouring of all things” (1 Cor. 4:10-13).

These were deep afflictions. The apostles endured agonies that would have broken most of us. But God intended to make a point, and He chose to make it through them. Not one of them would have traded away his afflictions for any degree of human splendor.

When we come into pain, our brothers and sisters are watching. The unsaved are watching. Even the angels are watching. In ways that we cannot perceive and might never guess God uses our afflictions to teach lessons to these observers. Our sufferings are never wasted, pointless, or futile. They are ordained by God to make us object lessons in the great drama of God’s self-disclosure.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
