

Our Burdens and God's Promises

Exodus 5:1-12, Judica Sunday

March 29, 2009

Beloved of the Lord.....It is not in the nature of man to bear any burden without complaint. If we are at work and our boss gives us a greater workload, we complain. If we do not have what we consider to be enough we complain. If our health is poor, we complain. If our Pharaoh increases our taxes, we complain. We are similar to the Children of Israel who murmured against the Lord when their journey in the wilderness was long and difficult. God's answer to their complaint was the sending of poisonous serpents into the camp which bit the people. That poison felt like a fire coursing through their veins and many died.

We might think it cruel for the Lord to do so. "Where is His love.....where is His mercy" some would say? But would the people have repented of their sinful complaint if God had not chastised them so? Would they have repented on their own had not God interceded? Indeed these serpents served to fill their hearts with terror over their disobedience! Suddenly they realized how utterly wicked it was to complain against the Almighty God who had so miraculously delivered them from Egypt! When they came to their senses they humbled themselves before God and repented of their complaint. With tender mercies the Lord then provided them a means of healing: a brazen serpent set up on a pole. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

When the Lord chastens and burdens His people, our hearts quickly turn away from the sins which destroy us toward the many promises and mercies of God. God does not want us to perish in the wilderness by trusting in our works, but He seeks to save us by the sure mercies of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Lord OUR Righteousness! In your burdens understand God seeks only to direct your faith and trust upward, from whence comes your salvation.

I. Only Pharaohs and taskmasters increase burdens.

After the Lord called Moses to be His minister, Moses and Aaron went before Pharaoh saying, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord." Pharaoh was as all men are by nature, desperately wicked and naturally opposed to the good will of God. The Bible says that the heart of every man is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" "The carnal mind is enmity against God." And "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." We should understand that

by sin and nature Moses and Pharaoh were no different. God by His grace alone had converted Moses. Thus it is not our sin which makes believers and unbelievers different, but God's grace which justifies and sanctifies the sinner. God's sheep hear His voice, though many Pharaohs know not the Lord.

Pharaoh therefore refused to give the Israelites temporary leave. Moreover Pharaoh told his taskmasters, "Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick." They would have to gather straw for themselves, yet the count of bricks could not diminish; an impossible task. When the slaves worked day and night to keep the count, but failed, the taskmasters beat the officers of the Hebrews.

Such Pharaohs still work the same way today. The "powers that be" often raise our taxes and burdens. In our present state of distress jobs vanish, hard work gives less reward, and certain banks and businesses with connections receive bailouts. Though it is not fair let us remember God is the judge. There are also many hardworking families who cut and slash their budget to faithfully pay their mortgage, while those who borrowed more than they were able to pay receive government help. Irresponsible behavior is being rewarded, and responsible behavior is being punished! We can relate to the Hebrews who faithfully made their bricks every day, yet suddenly they are commanded to make bricks out of stubble! Nevertheless we still have God's command, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

We should also understand as Moses was no different from Pharaoh by nature, so we have the same faults as those Pharaoh's and taskmasters placed over us. Doesn't a lazy husband increase the burdens of his wife? Doesn't a lazy wife increase the burdens of her husband? Doesn't a lazy child increase the burdens of his parents? Doesn't a slothful worker increase the burdens of his co-worker? Doesn't a cheating taxpayer increase the burdens of his fellow Americans? What is worse, these questions also apply in a congregational setting. Doesn't a lazy pastor increase the burdens of the sheep? Doesn't a lazy sheep increase the burdens of the pastor? If our fellow sheep is hurting and discouraged, don't we increase their burdens by not directing their soul to the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep? Don't we increase one's burdens when we do not admonish the wandering sheep? Don't we increase one's burdens when we pass by the wounded sheep on the other side? Don't we discourage our fellow sheep when we have more important things to do than hear the voice of our Good Shepherd in church? Don't we increase the burdens of our fellow sheep when we do not include them in our prayers, but pray for only ourselves, though the wolf is at the door?

When we look in the mirror of God's law, we see Pharaoh in our own reflection. We see an evil taskmaster who increases the burdens of others. When this truth sinks down in our heart, we sink down to the ground, look up to the heavens and say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner. Forgive me Lord for it is I who by my sins have increased the burdens of others!" We do not need to fear however as if God will not hear or listen to our plea. He will, for He has promised to hear and answer us graciously for the sake of His Son. There is "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all." Jesus is our eternal Brother, the Son of Man, our fellow Hebrew, the same as us, except without sin. Jesus fastened His tender eyes upon you, He saw your burdens, and with compassion He was moved of His own self to make your burdens His own. Though He was God Almighty who spoke to Moses from the burning bush, "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Your burdens He made His own. Your cross He was all to happy to bear. Your sins He set upon His shoulders, so that by His stripes you are healed. When we see such an infinite love as this from our Brother, our Savior, and our Friend, we are lifted up from the depths of hell to the highest heaven! "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." His resurrection is our resurrection! Faith now replaces fear, life replaces death, heaven replaces hell, and God Himself is now your Brother, your Savior, and your Friend. He has forever released you from your mountain of debt, and He has signed and sealed you in His grace, with the signature of His own blood. In His Means of Grace, His Gospel Word and the Sacraments, He offers to you on a silver platter, His forgiveness, His body, His blood, His grace, His tender mercies, even life everlasting. We come to church not because we are good, but evil, yet in God's house we are washed, we are sanctified, we are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

II. Our Lord increases our burdens for our own benefit.

Knowing these things we should understand there are benefits when the Lord permits our burdens to increase. First, God purges out our trust in good works, our self-reliance, and we see God alone is our Savior. If our government fails us, perhaps we will better understand the first commandment, how we should "fear, love, and trust in God above all things." Even if God grants us an evil Pharaoh, it is our heavenly Father who "makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Our catechism says, "God gives daily bread indeed without our prayer, also to all the wicked; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to know it, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving." It is only of God's mercy that we had our

daily bread in the first place, but now through this hardship God makes His mercies all the more clear. When we go without for any length of time, we suddenly become all the more thankful to God for what little we have. Whereas before we used to grumble and complain about our job, now we are thankful to God for it and we work all the harder to keep it. Moreover now when we see a brother in need, we do not pass by on the other side, but we stop and help. Charity suffers long, and is kind. Charity seeks not her own. Indeed we are filled with empathy towards those who suffer, for we were once in their shoes, and Jesus said, "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ."

When our burdens increase, we also pray more fervently. Finally at long last we see how weak and helpless we really are without God, but with God all things are possible. The child of faith once again turns his penitent eyes upward and with a childlike faith prays "Abba Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs", heirs of heaven....heirs of life everlasting! We pray without ceasing for "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" and Jesus said, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me." "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." Sometimes God gives us burdens only so we will give them back to Him in prayer. When we cast our burdens upon Him in faith, is there any burden we will be unable to bear? Hasn't the Lord already laid on Him the iniquity of us all?

Finally the Lord increases our burdens only so that our faith in His promises will grow. By these burdens God seeks not to diminish, but grow your faith. He wants you to trust in His promises of grace and mercy so perfectly, that you can hardly think of anything else but to be with your Savior in that life which is yet to come. He seeks to separate your heart from the love of this world, that the love of your Savior will burn all the brighter and more pure, that you set your affections on things above! Indeed when we see all these things by faith, when we see we still have our Savior and Deliverer waiting for us there above, suddenly our burdens become light as a feather. Our light affliction lasts but for a moment, but they work a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. As your Savior then once looked upon your burdens with mercy and compassion, so look upon Him with the eyes of faith and hear Him say, "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." Amen.

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