

HOW TO STAND IN THE TIME OF TROUBLE

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An only survivor of a wreck was thrown on an uninhabited island. After a while he managed to build himself a hut, in which he placed the little that he had saved from the wreck. He prayed to God for deliverance, and anxiously scanned the horizon each day to hail any passing ship. One day on returning from a hunt for food he was horrified to find his hut in flames—all he had had gone up in smoke. The worst had happened it seemed. But that which seemed to have happened for the worst was in reality for the best. The next day a ship arrived. “We saw your smoke signal,” the captain said. If our lives are in God’s hands “all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28). Persecution, danger, and sword—God is with us and for us; therefore let us be courageous and confident.

The fear of having to stand alone during the time of trouble is what has terrified many. It’s almost what we anticipate it would be like to be lost in outer space—the horror of being abandoned, forsaken in utter solitude.

A misunderstanding of an inspired statement may have added to our fear of the time of trouble. We read:

Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator.

When He [Christ] leaves the sanctuary, darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor. . . . Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose.¹

Please note that these statements do *not* say that those who are loyal to Christ will then be without a Saviour, without a Companion, without a Comforter, without a heavenly Father! God’s people will never be forsaken; and if they are not forsaken, then they cannot be truly alone. It is true that they will not be able to *see* or to *feel* the evidences of God’s presence with them, but that does not mean for a moment that He is not there with them. The saints will never be without a Saviour during the time of trouble, nor without a mediator in the sense of a communicator. The 144,000 will certainly be “without fault,” and (in the light of GC 425 and 623), they will have overcome sin while still retaining a sinful nature, but their overcoming will always be by virtue of a Saviour and their standing firm will be through faith in Him. But He will no longer be a “Substitute” to cover continued sinning on their part. Right? I think you will agree that the sealed saints will not be committing adultery, theft, speaking lies, etc.

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 614.

Consider Jesus on His cross crying out in anguish, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Was He truly forsaken? Never! “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” 2 Corinthians 5:19. “In that thick darkness, God’s presence was hidden. . . . God and His holy angels were beside the cross. The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed. . . . In that dreadful hour Christ was not to be comforted with the Father’s presence. He trod the wine press alone.”² Yet Christ conquered that terrible temptation to think of Himself as alone and forsaken. Before He died, He broke through the awful darkness into the sunshine above and triumphantly declared, “He has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.” His last words were a shout of triumph, “It is finished.” John 19:30.

As a young Pathfinder, we were once given a route map to follow while our Director remained behind. As we were riding our bicycles we would look for the waymarks on the route and they corresponded with the map in hand. Even though we didn’t have our leader visibly present we still had his map and we knew that we were homeward bound.

The Most Highly Honored Group in God’s Kingdom
James and John once naively asked Jesus for the highest places in His kingdom. Jesus asked if they were able to drink of His cup and to be baptized with His baptism. They childishly assured Him, “We

can.” Mark 10:39. But the Lord could not give them the place of honor they asked for. That is reserved for those who in an unusual sense taste of Christ’s cup of loneliness, and by faith conquer its bitterness. This will be their privilege during the time of trouble, when they live in the sight of a holy God without a mediator or intercessor, and wrestle with the temptation to feel themselves as forsaken as Jesus felt on His cross.

But they will have already learned how to say “No” to temptation. Therefore, they will conquer that final temptation to ultimate despair. There is royalty inherent in such a victorious faith! As no other group in all history, they will realize Christ’s special promise: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.” Revelation 3:21. That honor is not a mere token, like sitting in the Queen’s chair for a moment to have your picture taken. It is an invitation to share executive authority in God’s government, to be a member of His responsible committee that directs the successful conclusion of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. What a destiny! If Jesus’ promise makes sense, it can mean nothing less.

It is Satan’s accusation in the great controversy with God that sinners are incapable of coming into harmony with God’s law. There is an enmity against God that prevents this. The executive authority which Christ gives to His saints in the time of trouble is grace to live in temptable flesh; nevertheless, they would rather be laid in the grave than to disgrace their Saviour by choosing to sin.

² Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 754.

They will not be conscious of their purity of love and devotion. They will not boast of perfection. In fact, they will see themselves as unworthy sinners. They will cling to Jesus all the more in their trial of faith. Jesus' gospel triumphs in them and thus He grants them executive authority in overcoming Satan's last fling—his farewell party to the 144,000, the time of trouble.

If anyone's heart responds, "No, I don't want *that* close a fellowship with Christ, living in the time of trouble; rather let me go to heaven by the underground, subway route," he is in fact rejecting Christ in rejecting full fellowship with Him. If we have the choice between (a) the comfortable, peaceful sleep in the tomb that we call death (with the hope of the first resurrection), or (b) living through the time of trouble and actually welcoming Christ's personal second coming, we dare not avoid that final intimacy with Him.

If we accept Christ, we must accept Him like He is, cross and all. How else could we ever find the courage to face Him in His kingdom? Would we not be cringing behind some bush, ashamed to walk out in the sunshine and meet Him face to face?

Why the Special Resurrection

There have been some through the years whose faith craved this closer intimacy with Christ, yet who have had to die because their generation lagged behind in their commitment of faith. In a special resurrection at the close of the time of trouble, "all who have died in the faith of the third angel's

message come forth from the tomb glorified."³ We may not as yet fully understand all that is involved in this special resurrection, but it is clear that this group will share in the final trials and triumph of those who will be Christ's bride.

Could some of us someday face actual martyrdom? Closeness with Christ delivers from fear of martyrdom, because His perfect heavenly love "casteth out fear." 1 John 4:8. We have no assurance that we may not be called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice. To all who follow Him Christ gives the assurance, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. . . . He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Revelation 2:11. He implies that we may possibly be "hurt" of the first death! But none who die for the Lord are ever left alone.

To the martyr more than to anyone else comes the assurance, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Psalm 116:15. The same heavenly Father who notices when even a sparrow falls to the ground will not permit one of His children to be martyred unless He sees that his death is "precious" in the plan of salvation. In other words, no child of God will ever have to die in vain. Souls will be won by his utmost sacrifice, and the joy of the resurrected martyr will be to him a "crown of life."

John Paton was a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands. One night hostile natives surrounded the mission station, intent on burning out the Patons

³ *The Great Controversy*, p. 637.

and killing them. Paton and his wife prayed during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them. When daylight came they were amazed to see their attackers leave. A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ. Remembering what had happened, Paton asked the chief what had kept him from burning down the house and killing them. The chief replied in surprise, "Who were all those men with you there?" Paton knew no men were present—but the chief said he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords circling the mission station.

Learning to Overcome the Fear of Martyrdom

As we learn to appreciate Christ's cross, our fear melts away. This miracle is evidence of fellowship with Christ. He sang hymns of praise as He walked out of the upper room on His way to His cross. The Holy Spirit nerves His servants for that last full measure of devotion. There is no need to dread it. Unless we live to see the Lord come personally, death is inevitable anyway; martyrdom merely brings it a little sooner.

Someone may say, "But I couldn't face it! I am not ready!" True. The Lord does not give the grace needed by the martyr until the martyr's need arises. There is no need to worry about it, even for a moment. Rest assured that the Lord is never going to let you be tempted above your strength. He says, "My grace is sufficient for thee." 2 Corinthians 12:9. Let Him supply all the needed courage, nerve, fortitude, and peace when that time shall come. Hasn't He promised to hold you by the hand from

like a father holding his child's hand crossing a dangerous street? Psalm 91:11. Yes! Don't wriggle yourself out of His hand! Your happiness lies in trusting the Hand that holds you.

When we are young we can't live without friends. We must have close friends or we feel abandoned and all alone. It is like a validation of who we are to say that we have lots of friends who like us. No one likes to feel rejected and forsaken by a friend who goes for someone else and leaves us all alone.

The more we identify with Christ by faith, the more He becomes to us closer than a brother. His compassion, nurture and support are a constant presence. We desire none other than Him in our life.

After the great High Priest leaves the sanctuary and the shadows of the final time of trouble fall over the planet, there will be no more martyrdoms. The reason is that no soul-winning fruitage will then be possible. Every one on earth will by then have made his or her final decision. The Lord is mindful of those who have made their decision for Him. Every drop of His saints' blood is so "precious" that He will not permit any of it to be spilled in vain.

Who the Real Martyrs Are

To let ourselves agonize about possible martyrdom or living through the time of trouble is to manufacture trials that the Lord does not want us to worry with now. Self-made martyrs bring no honor to Him! He may surprise us someday by awarding the martyr's glorious reward to people who quietly, humbly take up their cross day by day and deny self while they live sweetly and attractively for the honor

of Christ year after year. They may die peacefully in their beds, but their day by day faithfulness “unto death” has counted as a lifelong sacrifice even more glorious than dying once for all the fires of Smithfield’s stake.

Our little trials now are kindergarten lessons in the school of Christ. Not one is to be despised or resented. When our eyes are opened to realize what God and His angels are doing behind the scenes, we will not waste time mourning or resenting these hardships. “Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. . . . No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” Hebrews 12:11.

Every trial that befalls us is monitored by the Lord as surely as the doctors and nurses monitor the patient’s heartbeats in the intensive care ward. Even today you may be tempted to feel that God has forsaken you when these trials come. But begin learning your lesson to believe His incredibly good news. The Lord permits these momentary temptations to despair to steal over us so that we can learn the lesson of Calvary. That lesson is precious: our Lord and Saviour cried out from His broken heart, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” so that we need *never* have to feel the same way!

When you are *tempted* to feel that you are forsaken, remember that now you don’t need to feel that way. It’s an illusion, a lie that Satan is trying to

force on you. The temptation to despair is his final one. Say a resounding “No!” to it. “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” Romans 8:34, 35. That catalogue encompasses all the gamut of our present day trials—including our bent fenders, our houses burning up, our sicknesses, cancer, poverty, marital problems, loneliness—the lot. The answer to Paul’s question is, Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ—except our own sinful unbelief.

The Good News About Your Trials

Take a new look at your trials that have been getting you down. See them in that true light that streams from Christ’s cross. Let your hitherto unwilling lips confess the word of faith that wants to well up from the deep places of your heart. Bring yourself to tell the Lord, “Thank You even for my trials!” What a victory you will gain!

Hold a few hands while you travel upward on that road. Let the Bible speak to your heart. There are hidden ones whom the Lord is preparing for a part in the finishing of His work. Keep close to Joseph, apparently forsaken of God when he was sold as a slave by his own brethren, into Egypt. Let us accept His discipline as Joseph did his in the Egyptian prison. He got out; but even if we never get out, let us at least honor the Lord by faithfulness where He places us, and cheerfulness in doing the duty that

comes to hand. Let him encourage you to believe God's good news when your future looks dark.

Keep close to David, the anointed of the Lord, hunted like a wild beast by the anointed king of Israel, Saul, for ten weary years and forced to live in caves. Let David's psalms feed your starving soul. (Jesus Himself lived on them so that He is called "the son of David." This relationship was not only genetic; it was a spiritual identity.)

Read about Elijah who had to stand alone against an apostate king and queen and nearly the entire nation of Israel. Keep close to Jeremiah, divinely appointed prophet of the Lord, despised, slapped in the face, thrown into a muddy well, imprisoned, execrated by the kings, princes, and priests of Judah. Listen to his honest prayers of remonstrance with the Lord:

"Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?

"Take me not away in thy longsuffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke. Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts." Jeremiah 15:18, 15.

When Jeremiah complained about his trials, the Lord kindly set him straight. His trials were his kindergarten lessons; what would he do when he got into his college classes? "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land

of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Jeremiah 12:5.

You can find in your Bible words that will be the joy and rejoicing of your heart, and you can "eat them." You will gain strength for your trials for today and all the preparation you will need for the time of trouble yet to come.

There is serious work to be done in preparing. All that we have ever read about the intensity of the trials awaiting us, is true. "The season of distress and anguish before us will require a faith that can endure weariness, hunger, and delay. The period of probation is granted to all to prepare for that time. . . . Those who are unwilling to deny self, to agonize before God, to pray long and earnestly for His blessing, will not obtain it. . . . When waves of despair which no language can express sweep over the suppliant, how few cling with unyielding faith to the promises of God."

We don't need any preacher or Bible student to remind us of the Saviour's love: if we fail a thousand times, He does not give up on us.

The price which Jesus paid on the cross in His sacrifice is great enough to care for us, no matter how far we wander away. This is not to encourage our wandering away; no; when we appreciate the "breadth, and depth, and length, and height" of His love revealed at the cross, we cannot wander away!

It's clearly stated in 2 Corinthians 5:14: "The love [*agape*] of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge [in other words this is not mere sentimentalism; this is cold logic of the purest kind!]

that if One died for all, then were all dead [that means, all would be dead if He had not died for us!]; and that He died for all, so that they which live should not live unto themselves [in other words, it's impossible for the one who appreciates what Christ has already done for him/her to go on living for self]; but unto Him who died for them and rose again" (vss. 14, 15).

"Appreciates"—that's a key word. That's not just raising your hand in a big meeting saying yes, you "accept Jesus." That means to contemplate, to think about, to let it sink in, what it cost the Son of God to save us.

He had to go to hell, to enter in, to give Himself to hell forever—because His love is so great. That is where He found us!

Mary, was in a terrible automobile accident when she was only five years old. Her grandmother, aunt, and only sibling—a younger brother—were killed. She, the only survivor, was trapped in that chamber of death for more than an hour before an emergency crew could get her out. It took her parents, who were touring Europe at the time, three days to get home. By the time they arrived, she had retreated into a cocoon of silence that lasted for nearly two years. Gradually, she emerged from her silence and returned to normal, or so it seemed. Mary forgot the accident, but the memory of it did not forget her. She was married in her 20s and had a baby. When her little son reached the age of her brother at the time of his death, the memories flooded back. She had a nervous breakdown and was institutionalized. That experience set her on a journey of pain,

healing, and redemption. She would never have chosen what had happened to her. "Let this cup pass from me," she would have said to God. But she did not have a choice. She came to realize over time that her suffering had a good effect. It served God's redemptive purpose. She understood the tension in which Christians must live—the tension between human weakness and God's strength, life's afflictions and God's redemptive plan.

Psalm 130: "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord. . . . There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be revered" (vss.1-4).

You never truly appreciate the extent of that "forgiveness" until you find yourself apparently abandoned in those "depths," out of which you finally "cry." I said "apparently;" you are never truly abandoned but you get to where the burden of your guilt and of your fear is so great that you feel like you have been abandoned; so . . . it's "out of the depths" that you finally cry.

Think about it; let your heart be "enlarged" to appreciate how deep are those "depths."