

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

Job – Sermon 3 of 4: *The Mystery of Why the Righteous Suffer*

Editorial Note: What follows is one of a series of four sermons delivered by Sidney Cox on the Book of Job.

I do not know the church at which this series of sermons was delivered. Based upon the presence of his wife, Violet (who died in 1967), and his reference to their upcoming 50th wedding anniversary, I would date this sermon circa 1965, at which time they were living in Detroit, Michigan. Sidney Cox would have been 78 years of age in 1965.

In this series of sermons, we see Sidney Cox, the Bible scholar and teacher as opposed to Sidney Cox, the preacher and evangelist. Also of note, this series is perhaps the only teachings of Sidney Cox from the Old Testament of which I have knowledge. During his life, his message to others primarily focused on New Testament themes: the living Christ and the love of God found in His son, Christ Jesus.

John Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. August, 2009.

[I'd like to add] my word of appreciation for your presence and your faithfulness, and particularly a word of welcome to our friends who are here for the first time. We were saying last night, that if you have the feeling that you are a visitor here, you'd better make the most of it, because you'll never have it again. When you come to this place, you do not have that feeling the second time. So if you're getting any enjoyment out of it, you'd better make the most of it, because this is something you will not experience again. The next time you come, you will not have that feeling of being a visitor. You're only a visitor here just once...so you make the most of it, will you?

Now, tomorrow night I do hope that if there is any possibility of you folks bringing somebody as nice as you are, I know that's a difficult job, but try it, will you? Come yourself and bring somebody as nice as you are tomorrow night. Because our message tomorrow night and tonight, for that matter, I think will be of importance. There may be somebody who will be just needing the message for tomorrow night with which we bring this study of the book of Job to a conclusion. You will know of course that we have only just touched the fringe of it. We have only just made a nodding acquaintance with it. We could go on and on and on and on and on with a book like this. And it would be profitable every time. But we have just touched the fringe of it. And if there is one person in the group that will come, either from Sunday night clear through to Wednesday, if there's just one person that says, "Well, I know more about the book of Job now than I did. I have a deeper interest in it, and from now on, I'm going to do some real studying of the book of Job." If there is just one person who says that, the whole thing will be worth while, especially if you're the one.

Now, I want to remind you please, and in a moment we're going to stop for a word of prayer. I want to remind you, and there will be no lengthy review tonight at all. In our first message, we talked

about, "The Man and the Book," because when you say the book of Job, you have both a man and a book. And on Sunday night, we talked about, "The Man and the Book." We took a fleeting glimpse of the man, we didn't spend very much time with him, we spent more time with the book. And we did that for the reason that we knew Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, we would be spending more time with Job perhaps than with the book. And so we looked at the book particularly on Sunday night. And then last night, we endeavored to see a little of the pattern of the book - how this great drama that is here in the book of Job unfolds before us. What are the dimensions of it? What is the plot of it? What is the setting of it? And we discovered, of course, that the setting is on earth and in heaven. And we were looking last night at, "Scenes in Heaven and Scenes on Earth."

Now, tonight we want to deal with the central problem of the book. The problem that we speak of as "The Mystery of Suffering." Now that's our subject for tonight. Tomorrow night we shall bring the study to a conclusion with a message on the subject, "When God Speaks." Now, let's have a word of prayer, and then we'll go on with our work.

Our Father, we do thank Thee for the goodness and the grace of God. We turn our hearts to Thee, our hands to Thee. We turn our need to Thee; how we need Thee this night. Here's a book that is filled with mystery. How could we ever understand any of it apart from the guidance of the Holy Spirit? And we pray that He who caused this book to be placed here in the center of the Holy Scripture, that He himself shall undertake for us, and that in this room tonight, we may know the Holy Spirit is leading us, guiding us, quickening our understanding, giving to us that insight, that perception of God's truth, that can only come from the Holy Spirit himself. And so we pray for Thy blessing upon us. If there is anyone here facing the mystery of suffering, we pray that some word of comfort and instruction shall come tonight and bring real blessing to them, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Now, in commencing our study tonight, I want to remind you of two things that have been said before. One is this: that the Job that you see at the beginning of the book and the Job, as we see him at the end of the book are two entirely different people. Now, the Job at the beginning of the book is fine and splendid. He is magnificent. You'll remember God's word of approval about him, "There is none like him in the earth." But when you turn to the end, you have a picture of a man who has grown. Grown spiritually, grown in dimension, so that you find him much greater, much more beautiful, much stronger, more magnificent than you find him at the beginning of the book. And in the center of it, from the picture at the beginning to the picture at the end, in the center of the book, you find God's process by which he changed the Job that was, to the Job that he became. This is God's process of doing this very thing.

Now, the second thing I want to remind you of is, when we consider this question of the mystery of suffering, we want to know just what we're talking about. Because there is a side of that question that is not any mystery at all. The question as to why the wicked suffer isn't any mystery; why shouldn't they suffer? There's no mystery about that. Wickedness holds within itself that which always inevitably brings, produces suffering. It's inevitable. It's all a part of it. Sin and suffering always go together. Then you turn to the other side and you find the question, why do the righteous suffer? That is another matter all together. Now that's the thing we're going to be talking about tonight. Why do the righteous suffer? There isn't any question that there is suffering that God allows to come to his children. Now, why? What's the purpose of it all? Now that's the question that lies before us tonight.

Let's state one or two things preliminary, and one of them is in the nature of a principle. Let's remember, if you please, and I'm not quite sure who said this, but whoever said it, to him I am greatly indebted. Someone said this, "That Satan tempts to bring out the worst in us. But God tests to bring out the best in us." Would you mind if I repeat that? "Satan tempts to bring out the worst in us. But God tests to bring out the best in us." Now in that definition there is the beginning of the glimmering of light, on this subject of why the righteous suffer. God is seeking to do something by means of suffering that can not be done by, in any other way.

Now, let's remember too, that in this book of Job, the question that we have been considering for the last moment or two remains unanswered. There is no answer in the book of Job as to why the righteous suffer. The problem is there. The illustration is there. But the answer is not there. You can read through the book of Job, and you will not find an answer to the question, why do the righteous suffer. Now that doesn't mean to say that there isn't any answer. And it doesn't mean to say that you shouldn't look into the book of Job to find some light on the subject. Because the thing that we are facing is this, that while there is no definite answer, even from God himself, as to the mystery of why the righteous suffer, there is something else in the book of Job that is infinitely better than an answer. Now, what could be better than an answer to a problem like that? What could be better? Well, there is something that is better than the answer, and that's the thing we're going to discuss tomorrow night. What can be better than the answer, the reason for, or given, why the righteous suffer. What could be better than that? Well, now that's the thing that we're going to look at tomorrow night.

But, tonight we want to turn, not particularly to the book of Job, although we shall be keeping it in mind all the way; we shall come back to it at the end. But we want to see what is the New Testament teaching regarding this problem that is seen all the way through the book of Job? Why do the righteous suffer? Now we've got the New Testament teaching regarding it, and we want to take a good look at that. There is without question a process by which God cleanses, strengthens, refines the person, and through which he carries out his purpose and his provision, and he does it through what we speak of as, the mystery of suffering.

Now, in the book of Job, there is no question about this either, that in this book it is not merely a matter of a man suffering. It's not merely a matter there of God accepting a challenge from Satan to prove Job's faithfulness. That is not the purpose of it. The purpose is to prove God's all-sufficient grace to keep his servants, his own children, regardless of the clouds of difficulty and the storms of tribulation that may gather around them. The great central point that we see here, is not merely the tribulation' but God's great provision of saving grace in the midst of it all. God gives to Job the abundant grace, all that he needs for his need. And he'll give the same to you, if you'll let him.

Now, when we turn to the New Testament, and don't forget that whoever's, whatever name we mention, and we're going to mention two names. By the way we're going to have two visitors in just a minute or two, so you better get ready for them there. We know some of them by name, but I'm going to invite them to come into the meeting in just a minute or two. One's coming from one side, one the other. So you better look out now, in just a minute. But the two people that we are going to invite to come in is one is Peter and the other is Paul. And we're not just going to talk about them, we're going to invite them to come in and sit down on the front seat and stay awhile with us. But these are the two men who talk perhaps more than anyone else about this mystery of suffering, although every New Testament writer has this theme in mind. There is not an exception to it. Every

New Testament writer deals with the problem of why the righteous suffer. The why of suffering. Every New Testament writer faces it. It was the great problem, the inevitable thing that appeared no matter where the early church appeared, and no matter where God's grace brought men and women out of darkness into light, the first thing they faced was the problem of suffering. It was inevitable. Paul faced it. Peter faced it. Every early Christian faced it. It was the problem of why the righteous suffer. All the way through.

Now I want us to talk a little bit about what Peter has to say about this problem of suffering. And we're going to turn to the first chapter of his first letter. And in the meantime, we'll invite Peter to come on in. Let him come on in right now. We're awful glad to see you. Come on and sit down on this front seat here. Nice of you to come and visit with us tonight and perhaps help us with what we're going to do. Sit right down here where we can see you. Nice of you to write those two books that you've got there in the New Testament. Some of us haven't had time to get around and read 'em yet, but we have that in mind before we'll meet you in glory sometimes. We'll read them after awhile, but it was nice of you to write those two books. And we appreciate it. We'll read them after awhile.

Now, I want you to notice what he says about this matter of suffering, because he says it right from the very beginning there. Notice that in his word regarding it, he prefaces it with this regal statement, "We are kept by the power of God." Now, you listen in verse six how he starts with the problem of suffering, "Though now for a season, if need be, we are in heaviness through manifold testings." Now, I want you to see two words there. One, is the word, "season." The other is the word, "manifold." If you turn to your King James Version, as you probably have in your hands, you will find there that the word is not "testing," it is "temptation." Manifold temptation. But the word "testing" is better. And so we'll stay with this, and use this word, "testing." Manifold testing. Now I want you to notice those two words, "season" and "manifold."

Now, "manifold" is a beautiful word. And I want us to take a look at that word first of all. The word "manifold," it means variegated...many colors...many forms...many facets. The word variegated. And it means that, that trial and difficulty, and temptation and suffering may come to us in many different ways. But the word "manifold" is a beautiful word. Manifold testing. It doesn't appear too many times in the scripture. Sometimes it comes smiling at us out of the dawn with a radiance in its face and a song in our hearts, in its heart. One hundred and fourth Psalm, for instance- "O Lord how manifold are thy works. In wisdom hast thou made them all. The earth is filled with Thy riches." We've heard the choir sing it, or some choir sing it many a time; thanksgiving or some other time. (*Singing:*) "*O Lord, how manifold, how manifold are they works.*" Remember it? Well, it's a beautiful word, it certainly is. It's a beautiful word. And on this occasion it comes to us with the light of the morning in its face. But sometimes you see the word and it's covered over with clouds, difficulty. Manifold testings. That's something else, isn't it?

Now, I want to refer you to three times when this word "manifold" appears, because it gives us the pattern of the word and why it appears at all. Now, this is what I want you to notice, if you please. In Ephesians 3:10, you will find these words, "The manifold wisdom of God." Now notice this please, and we'll just put it right up here on the board, see it? "The manifold wisdom of God"- got it right up here. Manifold wisdom- notice it?

Now, we'll look at the other one and it's in First Peter 4:10, "The manifold grace of God." Now watch it! Going to put that up on the board. Here it is now. "The manifold grace of God." "The manifold wisdom of God." Now, we've got wisdom on one side, and grace on the other. Now, we'll take the third reference and put it right in the center - "The manifold testing." We're going to put that right in the middle. Now, you see where the manifold testings are; they're right in the center with wisdom on one side and grace on the other. Now just to look at manifold testings, without the wisdom on one side and the grace on the other, that's tragedy. That's the thing that brings shadows and defeat and disturbance within the light. Do you have to look at the testings without seeing on the one side God's wisdom from whence it came and God's grace that always accompanies it? Let me remind you, my dear, that testing is never a single unit in God's purpose. Never. It's always part of a trio and when testing appears, wisdom and grace appear also. And testing is part of a trio. It isn't a single thing. If testing appeared without wisdom and without grace, what a tragedy that would be. But it doesn't. God never sends testing to his children unless the testing is accompanied by wisdom on the one side and grace on the other.

Now we look at the testing, the suffering, and we say it comes from the manifold wisdom of God. And it is accompanied by the manifold of grace of God. Now if that be so, and it is, if that be true, then it ought to take one word from our lips. It ought to take the word "why" from our lips. But believers, the child of God has no right in view of this teaching to stand in the presence of the heavenly Father and say, "Well, why did you let this thing happen to me? Why did you send this to me? Why did you do this? Why did you do this? Why?"

Now, that's the thing you hear quite frequently. As a matter of fact, I've heard it during these meetings. "I can't understand why God sends this, or why God allows this, or why that says and God does the other? Why did God do this?" I've heard it while these meetings have been going on. But that's a word that shouldn't be on the lips of the believer if this is true. We have a right to ask questions, of course. You can ask where and when and so on. You can say, "Lord, what will Thou have me to do?" That's right. You can say, "Lord, when do you want me to start?" You can say, "Lord, where do you want me to go?" That's right. They're questions that we ought to ask. And if some of you in this room were to ask that question, I know what the Lord would do with you too. He'd give you the answer and he'd send you to South America or Africa or the Miami Bible Institute or somewhere else. He sure will. He sure will. This question there. But we have no right in view of this, to the asking, "why, why, why?"

Now, let's look at the other word for a minute. This word, "season." How long is a season? Immediately it shows a limited period of time. God's testing come, do thy work, and God lifts the burden. Now that's true even if the burden lasts all the night, and it seldom does. When God sends suffering, it is a trial for a season. Notice it if you please. How long is a season? If winter comes, spring can't be far behind. Or if spring comes, whatever the phrase is there, one gives place to the other. It's a limited time. That's what we're looking at. We're not looking at a perpetual, eternal thing at all. We are looking at something that takes place within a limited period of time. How long is a season? How long? How long? How long does this season of affliction last? Hmm?

Well, let's ask Paul to come in. We'll bring him in from the other side, and sit him on the other side here. Nice to have them here, isn't it? Sure is. Nice to have Peter over here and Paul over there. You don't have to get them too close together, you know? There might be a little difficulty there, but we'll

keep them apart just for the time being. Let's have a look and see what Paul says about this season of affliction. How long does it last? Well, he talks about it, this light affliction, which is but for a moment; so that the season now becomes a moment, you see? Now, how long is a moment? How long? Let's ask Paul again. How long is a moment? In a blink. In the twinkling of an eye. And on God's clock, and on God's calendar, this seemingly endless trial is but a tick of the clock. It is but one beat of the heart of your great Heavenly Father. It doesn't last. Even though it may last seemingly in our way and in the way in which we calculate time; it may seem to last a long time. But through it all you can see the manifold wisdom of God, and the manifold grace of God, and the thing that God is doing through it, that he could not accomplish in any other way.

The last time Mrs. Cox and I were at the great naval sanitarium...or hospital, that's the better word in Cargo, Louisiana. It's the only leper hospital in America, and we've been there more than once. The last time we were there, we had a most unusual experience. The chaplain took us around. I've conducted meetings there where every person in the audience has been a leper...much larger audience than this, by far. And every one of them, lepers. The last time we were there, the chaplain took us around to see a number of things, and then he said, "I want you to see one of our patients." And he took us into a room, I shall never forget it. There was a man, two men in that room, one was reading to the other. On the bed was this man. His hands were gone. His feet were gone. His eyes were blind. The only thing he could do there, when he wanted to listen, because he could still hear, when he wanted to listen to his little radio set - they had rigged it up so that he could turn it on with his teeth. And here he was, this man with the mark of death upon him. And we stood by his side and looked at him. And then the chaplain said a rather unusual thing. He said, "Now when you go to a hospital to visit somebody, you usually pray with the patient." But he said, "We want to reverse that this time. I want this patient to pray with you." Now here he is, see. This man in the depths of affliction. Put your little problems beside that, see. Put your little two-by-four affliction by the side of that one. And do you know that we have seldom heard a prayer more beautiful, more filled with thanksgiving, more filled with unquenchable faith than came from the wounded face, the marred face of this man in that hospital room in Cargo, Louisiana. This light affliction. And we went out thinking to ourselves, "My, how small, how mean we are, that we grumble sometimes about some little thing that happens to us. When out of the midst of a testing like this, suffering like this, there comes the radiance of an unquenchable faith." The man has long since gone to heaven. One of the people we are hoping to meet some day, is the man who prayed with us that day in the midst of his suffering in that room in the hospital in Cargo, Louisiana. This light affliction, which is but for a moment.

You see, the reason for it all is that God is testing something. Not just somebody, but something. He's not testing one's body by this sort of thing. Suffering doesn't come in order that our bodies might be tested. But Peter tells us that the trial of your faith, that's the thing that God is testing. God is putting our test, our faith into the crucible, and putting the fire underneath it in order that the gold might be refined, and in order that the dross might be cleared away. That's the reason.

Let me remind you, my dear, that God refines gold through suffering. There is nowhere that indicates that God will ever refine hay and wood and stubble. God doesn't refine those things. All he does is just burn them up. That's all. But where gold is, then the refining process is there - always in order that the metal might be purified, and in order that the dross might be cleared away. And the reason why suffering comes to you, beloved, is not merely that you might endure something patiently in your

physical body, but in order that through it your faith, the gold of it, might be tested and refined and brought out so wonderfully and so beautifully for the glory of God.

Remember it's Peter himself, we're so glad you said it, but Peter himself is the one who talks about the fiery trial...the fire underneath the gold of your faith. The fiery trial. It's Peter who talks about that. There's a reason for it. When God our Father lights the fires of suffering underneath us, you can be quite sure that there is something worthwhile testing there, and it's the one thing that will bring joy in the midst of the suffering. That's it. When you can see what God is doing for us.

I don't know if you know the lovely verse that dear old Charles Wesley wrote generations ago. He wrote this verse: "Refining fire...go through my heart...illuminate my soul...scatter thy light through every part...and sanctify the whole." And you'd better not throw that out the window, because it happens to be a little bit of Methodist theology. We'd better fasten onto that. "Refining fire...go through my heart...illuminate my soul...scatter thy light through every part...and sanctify the whole." That's the purpose of suffering. That's what God can see in it. And one of the things that comes out of the refining process is the ability to see what God sees in suffering. That's one of the reasons why it comes. This suffering that is called, the fiery trial.

Now, let's turn to Paul a few minutes. We all thank him too for the many things that he has written. Let us turn for instance to his letter to the Philippians and see what he has to say about God's purpose. What is God doing through suffering? We know what he's doing for us. He is refining the gold, clearing away the dross. Now let's look about it, look at his purpose, what is he doing through us there? Let's look. Verse twelve, chapter one. Did you notice that both of these writers begin to deal with the question of suffering right at the beginning of their letters. We don't have to look very far. We will find it in every single letter. Every one. Now let's look- verse twelve. "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." Now what did happen to him? Well, the letter is being written from a Roman prison, to start with. And all of the things that Paul says he has suffered, he has suffered most of them up to that time. Strikes and imprisonment, this was the church. This was the place where Paul and Silas were in the stocks and their backs were bleeding when they sang at midnight. This is the place. And now he's in a Roman prison. And he says, "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." That's what God could see. This was a process by which God was pushing out the horizons of the gospel. The furtherance of the gospel. We have his eyes that only see Paul's bonds. God could see what was happening because of those bonds. And Paul himself could see, and he wanted his friends in Philippi to be able to see also. "So that my bonds," here it is, "my bonds in Christ are manifested in all the palace, and in other places. And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."

Notice three things there that happened because of Paul's bonds. One, the furtherance of the Gospel. Two, the saints in Caesar's household. It was the means by which God could break down the iron curtain around Caesar's palace, and get the message of the Gospel through. And there were saints in Caesar's household. There was no other way by which the Gospel could ever have entered Caesar's household, except by putting a man in whose heart and life the Gospel shined with an earthly glory as it did in the life of Paul. And put him in prison. And somebody there, one of those Roman guards hearing Paul talk, watching the look on his face, would go back and tell his friends in there, "I have the

most unusual prisoner I've ever seen in my life. You ought to hear him talk. You ought to see the look on his face. You ought to see the people who come to him. I don't know what he's got, but he's got some secret there." And he might have added, "I wish I knew." And then after awhile, he did have it, and he knew. And by means of this, the Gospel was able to get into the palace of the Caesars. Notice it again, the encouragement that came to the weak and halting brother. And because of the encouragement, because of the inspiration that he received by knowing of Paul's behavior, even under prison's circumstances, he too became bold to proclaim the word of the Gospel.

You see what God was doing through suffering? Did you see what God was doing there? How God was accomplishing something? How God in his great grace was doing something through suffering that he could never accomplish any other way? Did you see it? This is what God has in mind there. You don't notice how Paul puts the incidental and the fundamental side by side. You've seen that over and over again. You can find it in the first verse of this letter, but you find it there in the twelfth verse, too. You notice it in this twelfth verse. Which is the incidental thing, and which is the fundamental thing in this twelfth verse? "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which have happened unto me." That's the first thing. "Have happened for the furtherance of the Gospel," that's the second thing. What has happened unto me- that's incidental. What has happened for the furtherance of the Gospel - that's fundamental. That's the important thing. What happens to us is not the important thing, as difficult as it is for us to understand that. But what happens because of it, is the fundamental thing. That if someone looking at your life, and looking at your behavior, and looking at the way in which you express and experience joy in the midst of tribulation and trial and suffering; if somebody sees the radiance of that, and takes courage, and takes a good long look at Jesus because of it, then surely this is worthwhile.

And so we've got two things. One, what God is doing to the individual in the refining process that comes, the fiery trial that is there. What God is doing through that individual for the furtherance, the pushing out, of the Gospel, for the strengthening of the feeble ones, for the piercing through iron curtains into areas that could never be reached in any other way. We have yet to measure and understand the depth and power and privilege of suffering.

Now that's the New Testament teaching about it. And remember we have only touched the fringe of it. We could go on and on and on and on and bring James and John and the rest of them, all the witness to the great and good purpose of God, when in his kindness, notice the word that I use, when in his kindness, he allows suffering to come to one of his children. Now, that's the kind of illumination that brings joy in the midst of tribulation. It is because of this that Paul was able to say, "Count it all joy when you fall into diverse testings." Count it all joy - joy in the midst of sorrow. That's the answer, and that's the reason.

Now, let me remind you if you please, as we close tonight, of the one thought that we shall seek to develop tomorrow. Remember this is a Bible conference, a class. We are not endeavoring to preach at all. This is a teaching period. Tomorrow night we are going to deal with the last phase of this subject, and it comes right out of the book of Job. Now, we've turned away for a moment to find the New Testament answers to the questions in Job. But tomorrow night we're coming right back to the book of Job, and we're going to listen to what God has to say about it. What does God say about this? What is the answer that God gives as to the mystery of suffering? And God doesn't give any answer at all. And we indicated at the beginning, that God does give something that is better than an answer.

Now what is that something that is better than the answer? And that is the thing that we shall be talking about tomorrow night when we discuss the subject, "When God Speaks." And in case you were wondering, the clock says it is exactly 8:30.

Let's have a word of prayer:

Our Father we pray for Thy blessing upon us, and we give thee thanks for the privilege and joy of studying Thy word together. May it be constantly the lamp to our feet and a light to our path. May we hide it in our hearts, that we may not sin against thee. We give Thee thanks for the book and for the privilege and for this house and for this dear people. And we ask for Thy blessing and grace upon it as Thou dost gathered together what has been said tonight. If there is anything that has been done in the energy of the flesh, we pray for Thy forgiveness, for Thy cover in grace. Let Thou take anything that is worthwhile, preserving, and do just that...preserve it for Thy glory we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.