

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

Job, And How God Uses Suffering

Editorial Note: It is unknown the date and place that Sidney Cox delivered this sermon. It was not a part of the four-part series on the Book of Job contained elsewhere in this archive. It may have been one of the sermons delivered to the Christian Men's Committee of Toccoa Falls, Georgia in the early 1960s that are referenced in another section of these archives. This speculation is based upon the reference to the themes contained in I Peter, Chapter 1 that are common with the theme of Job.

J. Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. July 30, 2010.

(This recording picks up as Cox is responding to a thought that apparently had been expressed previously in this service). . . . remember, that there's a difference all together between sorrow that comes in one realm and sorrow that comes in another. When sorrow comes to the Christian, there is an answer to it. When the sorrow comes to someone who is not a Christian, then the only resource is that which he has wrapped up in himself. And here is an amazing thing. I'm so glad our brother brought it out, because if it doesn't do anything else than make us feel ashamed of ourselves, that with all of our eternal resources, we are still so apt to go down under the waves of sorrow and suffering that come upon us. And so that would be my comment on it for tonight.

Now, let's go on, if you please, for just a moment or two, following on the thought that we had yesterday, or last Wednesday, excuse me. We were talking together about this central problem that is in the book of Job - the mystery of suffering; suffering that is always a mystery unless we can see it from God's point of view; unless we can see what God is doing in it, and through it. What He is doing for us, and what He is doing through us. Now, there's the two sides to it always. And you'll remember that we mentioned that while the problem is there in the book of Job, the answer is not. The answer is somewhere else. There is an answer, and the answer is given in the New Testament section. And we turn to any of the New Testament writers you care to, and you will find every one of them are facing this problem of why the righteous suffer. Every one of them.

We just turned to what Peter had to say because we were fairly familiar with that. We'd been over the first chapter of I Peter, and we remembered certain things, particularly one thing that he said in that first chapter and the 7th or 8th verse. As you go on down it, you will find that he's talking about this - that if there should come a time 'if need be' when you find yourself in the midst of testings. . . 'Manifold testings,' he speaks of it. And he also says that if this comes 'for a season, we are now in heaviness through manifold testings.'¹ And then he goes on to say the purpose of the testing, the fire that is being put underneath us by testing, is not to test our bodies, but to test our faith. "The trial of your faith." And it's the faith that's much more precious than gold.² Now, there's the thought.

And we spoke a little while and dwelt a few minutes on this lovely word of 'manifold.' And we found

¹ I Peter 1:6, paraphrase.

² I Peter 1:7, paraphrase.

that testing is right in the midst of two other things. It's part of a trio that you find testing, as the word manifold, as we find it in the Epistles of the Ephesians, where it is with the 'manifold grace of God,' or the 'manifold wisdom of God.' And Peter talks about the 'manifold grace of God,' and in between, 'the manifold testing.' And testing to the child of God does not come ever as a single unit. It's always part of a trio, that when testing comes, then wisdom appears and grace appears also. And there is always the thought of God's wisdom that's back of it and God's grace that accompanies it, and that's the only thing in earth or heaven that can ever turn testing and suffering from a difficult situation into joy unspeakable. That's the only thing.

Now, there's another word that's there, and I want us to look at that for just minute or two. It's the word 'season.' Let's remember, if you please, that this is the word that appears, "If for a season, if need be ye are in heaviness through manifold testings."³ Now, let's look a bit and see what this word 'season' means. Because here's another descriptive word that sort of circles around the thing that we have in mind and in our hearts, I trust. A 'season' – how long is a season? Does it last forever? It's only a limited period of time. Now, sometimes suffering seems as if it lasts forever. But when you talk about time and a season of this kind, it's just as well to remember what God is thinking about and what time means to Him.

Sometimes it seems as if suffering lasts for all of life, but in spite of that fact, it is but the tick of a clock in the sight of God. A season. Usually it's a period of testing that comes, does its work, and disappears. A season, just like any other season: it comes, it does its work, and it is swallowed up in the future. And so a season is a limited period of time. Let's keep it in mind, if you please. A season.

Now, in order that we might have some clarity in our thinking, how long is a season when you talk about it from the Bible? How long is a season? How long is it? Can you give me any idea of it? A season is how long? A season, what? This 'season of affliction' - Paul speaks of it that way. What? Well, now, he comes right to the point in this matter of affliction and says this. "Our light affliction which is but for a moment,"⁴ that's right, so that the season, remember who it is that's keeping the clock, a 'season' now becomes, a 'moment.' That's how long it is, no matter how long it may be to us, that's how long it is with God. He lets it come to us in his wisdom on one side and grace on the other until the purpose has been accomplished. And that's the only thing that can bring peace in the midst of the storms of suffering that sometimes come.

Now, a 'season' is now a 'moment.' How long is a moment? Does it tell us that? (Audience comments). Say it out loud. (Audience comments). In the twinkling of an eye! In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.⁵

And I think I've probably told you before that I have a close personal friend who is an eye specialist, and I asked him one day, I said, "Doctor how long is the twinkling of an eye?" And, you know, his eyes twinkled because he knew what I was thinking about, anybody does who believes and knows what the Bible teaches about the second coming of Christ. That's not foreign language to us, the twinkling of an eye. I said, "How long is the twinkling of an eye?" He says, "Well, if you're talking naturally, it's one

3 I Peter 1:6

4 II Corinthians 4:17

5 I Corinthians 15:52

fifth of a second. But if you're talking spiritually, it's much less than that.” And he's right too, because one of these days, my dear, if you've been born again, you'll find out how quick a twinkling of an eye is, when one moment you're here and the next moment somewhere else. Now, we've got this. Here it is, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

And it is God's way of doing something with us and in us so that his purpose can be carried out through us. Remember, if you please, that the Bible is as distinct in telling us what God does with the tested Christian as it is describing the testing process. The testing process comes. Then the tested Christian remains and God does something with the tested Christian he couldn't possibly do with anybody else. That's the reason for suffering. That's the big reason for suffering. Not that it might do something for us personally; it does that, but in order that the tested Christian could be used in a way that the untested Christian cannot be used. And we've got illustration upon illustration of this - how God can work miracles of grace through tested Christians.

One, of course, is in the first chapter of his letter to the Philippians, where Paul is in prison. And here he is in bonds, and he speaks of it there. And he writes in his letter, and he says, “I don't want you to be disturbed about my bonds and my imprisonment. I don't want you to be disturbed. God has planned all this. He's put me in jail because he can do more with me in jail than he could with me out of it.” And that's so, over and over and over again. And He did, because several things happened because Paul was in jail in bonds, and he says, “I don't want you to be disturbed about that. What's happened to me, that's incidental. What God is doing through it, that's fundamental.”

And through this experience of suffering, God was pushing out the horizons of the gospel. The gospel was going somewhere where it could never have reached any other place. And it was breaking down the barriers surrounding even the ‘palace of the Caesars,’ until the letter to the Philippians ends with this majestic phrase, “There were saints in Caesar's household.”⁶ And the only way it could ever have happened was to put a man in prison and then bring these men, these soldiers, from that area and put them in touch with him. And I've sometimes imagined one of them going back and saying to another one, “What kind of a prisoner were you guarding?” And he'd say this, “You should have seen the one that I was guarding. I've never seen anybody like him. I've never heard anybody talk like him. You should see the kind of folks that come and visit him. You should see them. There's no wonder. I wonder what it is, what's the secret of a life like that. I don't know anything about it.” And then afterwards, he found out. And there were saints in Caesar's household. But that's God's way. That's God's way. And if we could only see God's purpose in it all, our little old two by four problems and trials and sufferings become as nothing at all.

I'm going to do something again; I'm quite sure I've done it before. I want to tell you about a man that I met years ago. Mrs. Cox and I were at the navy hospital in Carville, Louisiana. It's the only leper hospital in the United States. All the patients there are lepers. I've conducted meetings there - two or three hundred folks in the audience, everyone of them lepers. Now, when we went this time, the chaplain who knew us said, “I want you to visit one of our patients.” And he took us into a room where one of the incurables was. There were two of them there, as a matter of fact - one of them reading to the other. The man he wanted us to see was on the bed over here. And we looked at him, his hands were gone. There was just the stumps of his arms left. His feet were gone. His eyes were blind.

6 Philippians 4:22

Fortunately, his teeth still remained. And they had rigged up his little radio so that he could turn it on with his teeth. And he used to listen a little bit. Now, here he was, suffering, tribulation.

And we stood and in spite of ourselves said, "I wonder why." Now, the chaplain said to us, "When you visit patients in a hospital you usually pray with them." He said, "This time I want us to reverse that. I want this patient to pray with you." And we stood by the side of that man's bed and suddenly in the midst of all the horror that was there, it just seemed for a moment or two as if Shekinah glory suddenly slashed out of that terribly wounded person. And I have seldom heard such a prayer of gratitude and thanksgiving and selflessness as came flowing out of the wounded lips of a man in the navy hospital in Carville, Louisiana. He's gone to heaven long ago. I hope I'll see him someday to thank him for praying for us. And I'm wondering how beautiful he will be when I see him, not at all like he was. Don't you see? Not at all like that.

Now, that's God's wisdom and God's grace and God's enabling and, more, God Himself in the midst of a situation like that. Now, that's the answer. Now, my dear, you put your two by four problem up against that. You put your little difficulty – if you could only see what God is doing. If you can only trust Him. Trust Him when you can't see. Trust Him when He doesn't give explanations. God is looking for folks who will trust Him without explanation. You can get lots of folks who will trust Him when everything is explained. You can buy them a dime a dozen. Our churches are just packed with them. But you'll only find one person here and there, just one here and there, who will trust Him in the midst of suffering without explanation. Here was a man who trusted Him without explanation. God trusted him with the suffering and he trusted God with the explanation. And I could go on and on and on and on telling you things that we ought to know about this matter of the wonder-working grace of God that can only come in the midst of suffering. "This light affliction which is but for a moment."

God was doing something in the life of Job that he couldn't do any other way. And the Job at the end of the book is so much greater than the Job at the beginning. And this was God's method of transforming the man that was into the man that he became. And, my dear, it may be God's method of transforming you from the person you are into the person he wants you to be. Shall we pray?

Our Father, we pray for thy blessing upon us and give Thee thanks that in the quietness of this moment, we have been able to think together. What a privilege it is that thou dost somehow and occasionally grip our minds so that we can think together. We pray for Thy blessing upon us as we go out from this room with the thought deep down in our hearts, wilt Thou do for us that which seemeth good to Thee in the way that is good to Thee. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen. (audio ends)