

Our Lord: the Extraordinary Guide

September 28th, 2014, Shizuoka Bible Camp
 Gotthold Beck

比類なき導き手である主
 2014年9月28日、静岡よろこびの集い
 ゴットホルド・ベック

Romans

8:28 And we know that for those who love God, that is, for those who are called according to his purpose, all things are working together for good.

8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that the Son might be the firstborn among many brothers.

[International Standard Version]

Although it has almost nothing to do with today's subject, I would like to begin with the following two verses, because these have become my favorite ones these days. They are from chapter 32 of the Second Chronicles, which are the words of King Hezekiah that encouraged his people. These are, of course, the words from God.

2 Chronicles

32:7 "Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid or disheartened because of the king of Assyria or because of the army that accompanies him, because the one who is with us is greater than the one with him.

32:8 He only has the strength of his own flesh, but the Lord our God is with us to help us and to fight our battles." So the people were encouraged from what King Hezekiah of Judah told them.

The words of Hezekiah are wonderful ones of encouragement, aren't they? Today, I would like to discuss with you the Lord as an extraordinary guide.

We all suffer from various problems, agonies and pains in our lives. And very often, we do not know how to find the answers to the problem we are facing. So many people are left standing before a mountain of troubles and are agonized without knowing what to do. However, those who know the Lord have the blessings. They do not have to worry about anything and they do not need to be agonized for they entrust everything to the one who can do all things. Indeed, we all face difficult situations which, very often, leave us at a complete loss. This was exactly what Jacob experienced.

Genesis

42:36 Their father Jacob told them, "You're causing me to lose my children! Joseph is gone. Now Simeon is gone, and you're planning to take Benjamin, too. Everything's going against me!"

He screamed with pain from the bottom of his heart. In his life previously, he had done so many things according to his own intention or strength. For many years, he was a crafty and contemptible man who cared about nothing but his own profit. However, this man, who had been deceiving people, was in the end betrayed by everyone. The Lord God never overlooks any sin. It was a harsh lesson that Jacob had to be taught.

When Jacob said that everything was going against him, he must have felt that everybody was acting as his enemy. He must have been so devastated. What should we do when, just like in the case of Jacob, we seem to have failed at everything in our lives? What kind of attitude is supposed to be taken?

The first thing we have to keep in mind is that even though it seems as if everything is falling apart, it merely seems that way. In the case of Jacob, his son Joseph was lost, but he knew he would absolutely see him again someday. Simeon was not with him either, but he knew the day would surely come when they would meet again.

When we see things from our perspective as humans, we cannot see the truth in many aspects; we are caught up in the feeling that everyone is acting against us or everything we do results in failure. But, the truth is totally opposite. The world is not actually against us; rather, these things are actually prepared for the good of us. However, because of our nature, we cannot recognize this fact right away. For this reason, we may say that these difficulties are hidden blessings. Why do these difficult things keep happening to us? Why are we presented with all these troubles? In actuality, we are surrounded by an uncountable number of problems for which, in pain and agony, we keep asking ourselves but can never find any solution.

In this sermon, we want to learn the reasons why these difficult things keep happening to us. There are three answers to this question. Firstly, the Lord, our governor, allows so many things to happen for the salvation of sinners. It is the intention of the Lord. Secondly, the Lord, our governor, lets so many difficult things happen for believers to be changed, for those who have already been saved to understand him better than ever. And thirdly, the Lord, our governor, does not stop so many difficult things from happening for the sake of the saved ones, so that they can truly be used as servants of the Lord and work as vessels in his hands.

When we look for the answer to the question why, how come these things happen, the first thing we can think of is that, as I just mentioned, the Lord, our governor, allows these incidents to happen for the unsaved people to be saved. Nothing is more important than that we reach the recognition of the truth, that is to say, we meet Lord Jesus. All things are utterly meaningless unless we encounter Jesus through them. So let me explain it this way: People have to be in a state of complete deprivation before they are given the chance to be saved. In other words, to be saved by the Lord God, we all need to first accept that we are lost. This world of today is characterized by material abundance. People are only wrapped up in what they can see and they do not have enough time to think deeply about the concept of eternity or the living Lord. This is characteristic of the time we are living in.

Most people are blind to the fact that they need the savior. Even when they have no choice but to accept this need, they still try to turn their eyes away from the truth. They want to avoid deep contemplation of the meaning of life or life after death. This is exactly the reason the Lord lets all these unpleasant things happen to us, which are so difficult to understand. The intention of the Lord when he leads people is to draw them close to himself so that they find forgiveness and the meaning of their lives.

Let us look at one real-life example from the Bible. The prodigal son was filled with self-confidence as he walked out of his father's house. Of course, he intentionally chose to live the way he wanted. He wanted to break free from his chains, and thus decided to enjoy his own life freely. When someone wants to walk their own path, the Lord lets them walk the way they choose. He never forces them to change their choice. But, although everything may seem to go well initially, someday the time will come when nothing works out as they expect. As a result, they begin to feel that everything is against them all of a sudden. When this son had used up all the money he had, he was abandoned by the people who had been good friends, and he finally discovered that he had failed in everything. Let us look it up from the Bible.

Luke

15:14 After he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.

Needless to say, it was the Lord who allowed this severe famine to take place.

Luke

15:15 So he went out to work for one of the citizens

of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

This was actually the most humiliating kind of job for Jewish people as they were prohibited from eating pig's meat. It must have been so unpleasant for him to take care of these filthy animals.

Luke

15:16 No one would give him anything, even though he would gladly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating.

However, after reaching this lowest point in his life, not only did he get back to himself, but he was finally able to return to his father's house. This was actually the beginning of his new life, one so blessed and fulfilled.

So many difficulties lie ahead of us in our lives. However, our Lord always has a clear intention: To push us humans to our lowest points and deprive us of everything. This is the way the Lord works upon us. It is not until we are deprived of everything we can depend upon that we can repent from the bottom of our hearts and believe truthfully in the Lord alone. This makes it possible for us to come close to the Lord God. As an answer to our question why, for what, as we have seen so far, our Lord, the governor, lets all things happen for the salvation of sinners. The Bible helps us to understand that the Lord makes us fail in many occasions of our lives to provide us with true understanding and repentance.

Let's consider again the question we keep asking: why, for what. As I just mentioned, the Lord, our governor doesn't stop many difficult things from happening for the salvation of sinners. The second answer is that the Lord, who governs all things, allows these things to happen so that believers, those who have accepted the salvation, can be changed. Not only non-believers, but believers too experience the cruelty of fate. Believers too are disappointed, devastated, and fall into difficult situations, the reasons for which they hardly understand. Why does the Lord allow difficult challenges to be brought into the lives of believers? Because it is necessary for their education and to make them holy. It is also for them to be changed into the image of the Lord.

Let's look at two examples from the Bible which prove this. I will read again some verses from the Romans chapter 8.

Romans

8:28 And we know that for those who love God, that is, for those who are called according to his purpose, all things are working together for good.

He said, “all things” instead of “most of the things” and “for good” not “for bad.” The brothers and sisters who lived in Rome in those days had this immovable conviction. They were firmly convinced that;

Romans

8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that the Son might be the firstborn among many brothers.

All things that lie ahead in our lives, all things that come into our lives are carefully placed there by the Lord for his use. Thus, there is nothing valueless or purposeless among these. And most importantly, through these things, we will be reformed and transformed to the image of the Lord Jesus. There are no coincidences in our lives. The Lord is standing behind everything, and he leads us with a clear purpose. “All things are expedient.” Let us keep this in our minds and remember it every day. The good thing, or actually the best thing that can happen to us is to be reformed. When the Lord disciplines you in his hands for your reformation, you will certainly feel pain. Your reformation will never be accomplished without you being broken into pieces. When it does happen, some people get disappointed and discouraged, lose their strength, and even give themselves over to terrible despair. People feel this way when things don't work as they expect, that is to say, when they only see nothing more than what is right in front of them.

Romans

8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that the Son might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Our Lord predestines all believers to eventually conform to the image of his Son. How wonderful this purpose of the Lord is! It is of the utmost importance that we keep our eyes on this purpose of the Lord.

The Lord gives infinite love to all that belongs to him. It is for this very reason that he disciplines and trains us. The Lord educates us because he desires to draw us near to himself so that we share in the holiness of the Lord. Our Lord is perfect and so is his guidance. Very often because we cannot understand all of his intentions, we become discouraged when facing difficult crises and sink into self-pity. How come I have to experience such things? Why do these difficult things happen to me one after another? Why do I have to go through so many ordeals which I can never understand?

Hebrews

12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, for those who have been trained by it, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.

You will understand it later on. It is important to know that although you may be filled with grief sometimes, it is only transitional, and you will eventually understand that it was happening for your own good.

There is one thing we should not forget. We are never like guinea pigs that are used in experiments of the Lord. The Lord always prepares nothing but the best for us as his well-beloved children. Even when everything in our lives ends in failure, we can still recognize the love of the Lord. All ordeals and disciplines of the Lord are actually proof of his love for us. We may not understand it at that moment, but the time will come when we will appreciate it and worship the Lord. Let us read this verse from the longest Psalm. Psalm 119 is the confession of David.

Psalms

119:67 Before I was humbled, I wandered away, but now I observe your words.

After all, David understood that it was good for him that he was humbled, it was necessary and it was actually the best thing for him.

We have been discussing the question that was raised at the beginning of this sermon. Why? For what? As I mentioned, there are three answers to this question. Firstly, the Lord our governor allows these things to happen for the sinners to be saved. Secondly, the Lord our governor lets so many difficult things happen for believers to be reformed. As the third answer, the Lord our governor also allows many things to happen to the life of those who have already been saved, so that they can be used as the true servants of the Lord.

Unfortunately, so many believers are still like trees that bear no fruit and the Lord cannot use them. What is the reason for that? It is because they still believe that they do not have to rely on the Lord for everything in their lives. They come to unknowingly depend on their own ability and knowledge. There should be no blessing when people have this kind of belief. Actually, many believers hope to do something for the Lord, to serve the Lord sincerely; they even beg him to make use of them. However, the reality is that these people are using the Lord for their own advantages, as excuses for something they want to do for themselves. But it is actually the Lord who intends to use humans. The Lord is willing to use his believers as his own vessels. The ministration that bears everlasting fruit should be the

works of the Lord himself accomplished through us, instead of our own efforts which are made on behalf of the Lord. This is the very reason why everything seems to be acting against us; the Lord has to treat us severely and we must be broken into pieces.

Let us now take a look at two real-life examples. The first example is Peter. Peter is characterized by his self-confidence and a strong spirit of independence. He had false confidence in his abilities. Let us look at some verses.

Luke

22:31 "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has asked

permission to sift all of you like wheat,

22:32 but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail. When you have come back, you must strengthen your brothers."

22:33 Peter told him, "Lord, I am ready even to go to prison and to die with you!"

22:34 But Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you deny three times that you know me."

Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has asked permission to sift all of you like wheat. And Jesus did not oppose the desire of Satan. This attitude of Jesus was very harsh and cruel, but it was truly necessary for Peter to be deprived of everything and to be driven to absolute despair. I want you to pay attention to the order that these characters appear in these verses. 'Devil' comes first. The next is 'I', which is Jesus, then, 'you' which is Simon. Peter and his brothers come last.

The Lord intended to strengthen other brothers through Peter. After all, he wanted to use Peter as the vessel to serve him. However, for this purpose to be accomplished, Peter had to be broken into pieces. This was the reason that the devil was given the permission to attack Peter. But while the devil's attack continued, the Lord never stopped praying for Peter. Because of this, Satan could not act at will. We dwell completely in the hands of the Lord, which means we receive eternal protection. It was the reason that the Lord stood between Peter and the devil.

Peter totally failed in everything. He was pushed to the edge of a precipice. He was left in darkness and could not see a ray of hope. He had lost all hope and was in a desperate situation. However, this was never an accident but was Peter's critical discipline. After this, Peter could not reply on his own anymore. This was the moment the Lord could use Peter to serve him for the first time. The Pentecost is a good example, as you are definitely aware of, when more than 3000 people not only heard the gospel, but were led to the salvation through Peter.

Another example is Paul. Just like Peter, Paul had to walk through the abyss. He was blinded and left in the darkness for three days. Later, he testified his experience in the Bible;

2 Corinthians

3:5 By ourselves we are not qualified to claim that anything comes from us. Rather, our credentials come from God,

This was a sincere confession of Paul.

2 Corinthians

3:6 who has also qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, which is not written but spiritual, because the written text brings death, but the Spirit gives life.

This was what he wrote. We all know what we need to do to bear fruit. We must deny ourselves and let our old selves die. I would like to quote this famous verse from John, chapter 24, although I believe you all know this by heart;

John

12:24 Truly, I tell all of you emphatically, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces a lot of grain.

Wherever we turn our eyes, we see so many people struggling under heavy burdens, having no place to run, and being agonized in hopeless situations. They are wondering why they have to go through so many ordeals and troubles, why they always have to fail? It must be because they are not yet confident about their salvation, and thus, they are still not firmly convinced that Jesus is so precious and belongs to them. It also happens because your savior is trying to transform you to the image of himself.

It is more important for us to understand the Lord better than just to be saved. We also need to be cleansed. You may have been trying to use the Lord for your own sake. But, the Lord now wants to use you as the vessel in his hands. I would like to read one more verse from the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy

8:15 (He) led you through the vast and dangerous desert, that parched land without water, with its poisonous snakes and scorpions. He brought water out of solid rock for you.

Huge rocks blocking our paths, obstacles in our life, insurmountable ordeals, pain in our hearts which we

can't evade; through all of these things, the Lord is trying to bring out the water. It is through these experiences that we can reach the Lord. Only after walking through this abyss can we truly be blessed and receive real life. As it is stated in the Scripture, "We will have rivers of living water flowing from his heart."

In the era of the Old Testament, as we see from two verses from Jeremiah, the Lord had to tell his own people,

Jeremiah

2:13 Indeed, my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and they have dug cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

Jeremiah

2:13 Lord, you are the hope of Israel; all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn aside from you will be written in the dust, because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water.

My people! My people have committed two sins. They have forsaken me, the spring of living water and have dug broken cisterns for themselves that cannot hold water. With these words, the Lord urged people to repent and come back to him.

Anyone who does not know Jesus yet needs to repent and return to the Lord. It is for their own salvation. People who have accepted Jesus still have to repent and keep returning to the Lord, to remain in him and to serve him as his instrument. Only those who abide in Jesus are united with the Lord and they can be a channel from the fountain of life, through which Jesus can reveal himself.

The sufferings of this present time are merely preparations to reach the life after death. The Lord never loses anyone from his hands. The Lord will govern all things forever. In nights of darkness or when we are overwhelmed by lamentations, the hands of the Lord are there to protect us. The hearts of depressed and discouraged people will be healed, and will rejoice again. The Lord will always be the Lord. The Lord is flawless and never makes mistakes. Although there seem to be too many things that are beyond our comprehension, we must trust that the Lord chooses what is best for us.

I am going to read from two more chapters from the Bible to conclude this sermon.

Romans

8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present

time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.

It is a wonderful confession of Paul. Now, these verses are from the fourth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians

4:8 In every way we're troubled but not crushed, frustrated but not in despair,

4:9 persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed.

4:10 We are always carrying around the death of Jesus in our bodies, so that the life of Jesus may be clearly shown in our bodies.

4:16 That's why we are not discouraged. No, even if outwardly we are wearing out, inwardly we are being renewed each and every day.

4:17 This light, temporary nature of our suffering is producing for us an everlasting weight of glory, far beyond any comparison,

4:18 because we do not look for things that can be seen but for things that cannot be seen. For things that can be seen are temporary, but things that cannot be seen are eternal.

Let me add some verses from the book of Habakkuk, chapter 3. I know that this is one of the favorite verses of many people.

Habakkuk

3:17 Even though the fig tree does not blossom, and there are no grapes on the vines; even if the olive harvest fails, and the fields produce nothing edible; even if the flock is snatched from the sheepfold, and there is no herd in the stalls—

After all, he was in much trouble. However, Habakkuk did not complain saying, "Everything's going against me." Instead, he said;

Habakkuk

3:18 as for me, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will find my joy in the God who delivers me.

3:19 The Lord God is my strength— he will make my feet like those of a deer, equipping me to tread on my mountain heights.

When we have this firm conviction in the battles of our daily lives, we can take the determined attitude that, "the Lord is alive and he is definitely present in my life."

End