

I Like Ike/Lessons from the Storm

“I like Ike” is a campaign slogan that takes us back to the Fifties when Dwight D. Eisenhower was running for President. As a little boy living just outside the nation’s capitol, I remember my father lifting me up on his shoulders to see President Eisenhower. Dad liked Ike and so did I. On the other hand, when we think of a hurricane named Ike, our first opinion is that there is not a lot to like about Ike. When we think of the havoc in Houston and Galveston, our hearts are wrenched. We are still in prayer for those on the Bolivar Peninsula of Galveston and the Houston area who have family members with confirmed deaths and the peculiar pain of those who have missing loved ones.

We have church members who have suffered some extensive loss. Thanks be to God we have no members (that we know of) who have lost their lives. One of our finest families at Christchurch is the Transeaus. Joel, Heather and the boys had to vacate their home during the storm. Thank the Lord his parents live nearby and they found shelter. Joel, however, soon found himself rushing his dad to the hospital with what appeared to be a reoccurrence of an aneurism that had previously caused a stroke. His dad’s test proved he was okay and is now home. Being in the full thrust of a trial that appeared to be doubling, Joel was still able to talk with me. While waiting for the results of his dad’s MRI, Joel spoke with wisdom. Listen to what he said, “Pastor, I’m glad God sent the storm. As Job said, ‘the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away.’ We’ve never really had a trial; we’ve had it so good. I am anxious to discover what God is going to teach us and the character that He is going to form in us through all of this!” These are the words of a very mature Christian. He also captured the essence of what a trial means to a Christian, i.e. it is a teaching experience. The Bible says, in Psalm 94:12-14, “Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked. For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.” The word “chastenest” in Hebrew is יָסַר, pronounced yâsar and means to chastise, literally (with blows) or figuratively (with words); hence, it means to chasten, to discipline, to correct, to instruct, to punish, to reform, to reprove, to instruct, admonish, to teach. In the New Testament, we read, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Hebrews 12:6). Here the word translated “chasteneth” in Greek is παιδεύω, pronounced paideuō. Thayer’s definition is: to train children, to be instructed, to be taught, to cause learn, to chastise, to correct, of those who are molding the character of others by reproof and admonition. The Bible says to “...count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (many and varied trials)” (James 1:2). Let us account our trials as a learning experience. Therefore, by faith let us “like Ike” because of the things he can teach us, such as:

1. Trials are a mark of God’s ownership over His children.

The Bible says, “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” (Hebrews 12:7). In the verse just before these words (Hebrews 12:6), God declares every child of His is chastened. The Puritan, John Trapp said, “Corrections are pledges of our adoption and badges of our sonship. One Son God hath without sin, but none without sorrow. As God corrects none but his own, so all that are his shall be sure to have it, and they shall take it for a favor.” Charles Spurgeon similarly said, “God had one Son without sin, but He never had a son without trial.” On another occasion Spurgeon said, “I bear my willing witness that I owe more to the fire, and the hammer, and the file, than to anything else in my Lord’s workshop. I sometimes question whether I have ever learned anything except through the rod. When my school-room is darkened, I see most.”

Two truths stand out; first, God proves His presence in the trial. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they

comfort me” (Psalm 23:4). Secondly, mature Christians interpret chastening as a time of learning. “But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

2. Trials are temporary.

Another Puritan, Thomas Watson wrote, “Our sufferings are short: 'After ye have suffered awhile' (1 Peter 5: 10); or as it is in the Greek, 'a little.' Our sufferings may be lasting, not everlasting. Persecution is sharp, but short. Though it has a sting to torment, yet it has a wing to fly. 'Sorrow and sighing shall flee away' (Isaiah 35: 10). The people of God shall not always be in the iron furnace; a year of Jubilee will come. The water of persecution like a land-flood will soon be dried up.”

My father oft reminded me that one of the most frequent phrases used in The Authorized Version is “and it came to pass.” It is used no less than 446 times. What a blessing, trials don’t come to stay, they will soon pass! “For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

3. Trials are reminders to place value on the valuable.

Jesus said, "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matthew 6:20). So much of life is expended on many things that are not overtly sinful as much as wasteful. The Psalmist said, “For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried” (Psalm 66:10). Solomon said, “The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD trieth the hearts” (Proverbs 17:3). As the fining pot heats up the silver, the impurities are skimmed from the surface until the silversmith sees his own reflection in the molten silver, then he cuts the heat, pours it out and forms it into that which he so desires.

The afflictions serve as the fining pot for the Christian. God is wanting to take away the dross until His sees the reflection of Himself in us. Then when He sees Jesus, we are usable vessels, meet for the Master’s use (II Timothy 2:21). John Owen (1616-1683), dean of Oxford’s largest college, Christ Church and chaplain to Oliver Cromwell said, “Afflictions refine the believer by breaking attachments to created things: Afflictions take off the beauty and allurements of all created good things, by which the affections are solicited to embrace and cleave to them inordinately. God designs by afflictions to wither all the flowers of this world, by discovering their inefficiencies to give relief.”

4. Trials separate believers From pretenders.

Many a hypocrite hides his cover well during times when all is going his or her way. But let adversity come and his cover is blown, he blames God unjustly and breaks fellowship with the godly. The trial that you figured had cost your lost, was really God’s way of bringing you great gain. It is when believers are banded together in faith that miracles are seen. Believing Christians are the atmosphere where Christ brings life. “And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying” (Mark 5:40). The Lord Jesus sent out the unbelievers and took the girl’s mother and father into the room and wrought a miracle by bringing her to life as revealed later in the text.

5. Trials are seed distributors.

The storm shook our trees like they have never been shaken. When the storm had passed, extensive cleaning was required. While cleaning the front yard we were impressed with the number of pinecones, literally driven into the ground. In our back yard we were equally impressed with the

number of acorns. In a meditative moment it was as though the Lord whispered to me, “And this is one of the blessings of the storm you have never seen: I disperse and distribute my seed by the wind and rain.” Haggai 2:19 says, “Is the seed yet in the barn?” God’s will is that the seed be sent to the uttermost parts of the earth, not stored in the barn. Also, He allows the trials to drive His Word deep into our hearts. “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). Great growth is destined to the believer that weathers the storm! Let the distributed seed do its work.

- Pastor Pope -

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