

sell Jesus for a handfull of silver? Why did he go back to the high priests?

The question of "Why" of death. We ask that question over and over again. One preacher said that he went to see a loyal church member, and she was sewing a dress by the fireplace. She said, "Pastor, I am making my shroud. Now don't be alarmed. I've always made my party dresses because I never trusted any one else. For every big event I've always made my own dress and this is going to be a big celebration and I want to make my own because it will be glorious to go into His presence and see my husband and my children. I'm not dreading it; I am looking forward to that party I want you to know."

This was a different attitude. She was expective of excitement. It was not a lonely path for her; it was not just one big question like so many times we ask "Why?"

The psalmists in the 43:55 said, "Why art Thou cast down oh my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?" This is the hour of discouragement. One can readily believe that all people at some time or another are visited with such depression of dispondency.

For example, Elijah confronted with the false prophets, There were hundreds of them and just one lonely man. The next day, he was fleeing in the wilderness. John the Baptist one day stood before Herod and was marvelous in his courage,

The Most Mysterious Question

Judges 6:13

"Why then is all this befallen us?"

This question I ask is more mysterious than death or eternity. If we knew its answer, we would know as much as God, and many righteous souls who believe in God--that God governs this world, that God is supreme--have asked this question, especially when their afflictions that are heavy. Mothers have spoken and asked this question when they have stood by the lifeless form of a child. Gideon spoke this question; Job uttered this question when God took away his possessions; the man in the Psalms asked this question. This is a question that was asked even by our Lord and Saviour. This is a question that is most mysterious.

It is here in the Book of Judges. This man is saying how do you reconcile the assurance of God's presence with the signs of actual weakness and distress all about. He knows of no blessing of which his country does not share. The glorious past of Israel was wonderful but how different from the days of the present. If God is in favor with His people, why is He inactive? Why the absence of His power? If the old records were credited to God--that He delivered His people--it seems that the heavens have not been closed up. The great calamities of war, draught, earthquake and yet heaven seems to be silent.

Gideon's heart was sad because of the loss of his own

brethern (Chapter 8:18-19), because of national calamities--the whole land was full of Baal. Doubtless he had loved to think of the bright days when all was well, but his language simply means, "How can you say Jehovah is with us when all this has happened to us. It is impossible for our true King to be in our midst. These things that have brought about the desolation that has passed over the land is clear proof that God is absent. He has delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

In a town in Alabama, a neighbor was invited to go for a ride with a family on a Sunday afternoon. The elderly neighbor really enjoyed herself. The fresh air, the beauty of the country side, the good fellowship. When they returned to her home and let her out, she said, "Thank you very much. This has helped me. I guess my trouble is I am lonesome."

Now she is a member of a noble family which has written its name in medicine, the military life--the Spanish American War, World War II--but most of her family had moved away and there were only two sisters left. For some months now, one of the sisters had been visiting in another state. She had remained in this old family mansion of 20 rooms, four baths living alone. She stated, "I guess my trouble is I am lonesome." This leads us to ask the question, "Why?" Quite often there are times of lonesomeness, and every human being asks the question, "Why?"

When a person has homesickness, they will ask the question, "Why?"

There are people who are lonesome for companionship. This is true of people who have had a hard time making friends. The preacher in the Old Testament said, "Woe to him that is alone when he falleth for he hath not another to help him up." So many people need a little help.

A new boy comes to a school and he is neglected--he is forsaken, and he's called all sorts of names. Sometimes he asks the question, "Why; why?" Then there comes on the matter of old age. In 1960 one-third of our nation were over 45 years of age, and one-tenth over 65. Now of course, all of them are not lonely; they have a lot of assistance and so on, but the question is still, "Why; why?"

Quite often children ask this about their grandparents. Grandmother is hard of hearing; she might embarrass us by literally shouting to us on the porch about some man or woman walking along the street--"Who is that long, tall, skinny fellow with that crazy looking woman?" The children will try to shut her up. On the other hand, when somebody is telling some nice juicy gossip and grandma could be two rooms away and hear every word of it. But we still have the mystery of this question, "Why; why?" Why did Simon Peter follow Jesus afar off? Why did he deny Him in the courtyard? Why did Judas betray that lonely night

The same is true all over the country across the vast valley here. Once there were thousands of threshing floors. You could see the yellow dust going up like smoke to heaven. But now you cannot see a single one. The enemy has swept it clean.

"And worse than that, the false worshippers have conquered and invaded the land. There is a grove of Baal and an altar to Baal even in the front of my father's house. God with me indeed! If God is with us and with our country, then why has all this happened to us? Why does God let the Midianites invade our land and devour our substance?"

"I have heard my father and my grandfather tell of the mighty miracles that God wrought in the past. He delivered our people with a mighty hand out of the land of Egypt--smiting the first-born of Egypt, clearing a way through the Red Sea, leading them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night--but now it looks as if either God did not care for His people or if He does care, He is not able to do anything for them as He did in the past."

"Why hath all this befallen us?" This was the question asked by Gideon to the angel of the Lord at this secret threshing floor is one which has never ceased in this world. We hear the echo of it as men look out today upon the state of this nation and this world and in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ if God is with us, why has all of this befallen us?

but a little later in prison, his spirit was cast down and he said, "Art Thou He that we should look for, or do we look for another?" Peter on the day of Pentecost was courageous, but on another occasion he was a coward. This verse of scripture from Psalms is the cry of David. He is saying, "Why? Why is it that he has this period of depression; why is he cast down why is he discouraged."

The causes of discouragement are many, and he was asking himself that question as to why. Sometimes the why is due to physical reasons. A person may not be in good health. The body influences the mind and the spirit. Jesus said to His disciples, "Come apart in a desert place and rest a while." That's why a person needs a change of pace once in a while. Life gets to be monotonous and we need a variety.

Quite often this why comes out of bitter disappointment, are disappointed in life. There is a false view of the facts of life which may cause us to ask why.

You remember the illustration of Elisha when his servant was all stirred up and asked the question, "Why?". He told his servant to look, and he asked the Lord to open the eyes of this young man that he might see. The Lord opened his eyes and he was able to see the mountains, the hills filled with horses and chariots sent from God. Quite often we are blinded to the help all about us--that God is ready to help us, but we are discouraged and we despair. We quite often compare ourselves

with somebody else; we make a comparison and bring discouragement to people.

We need to be as devoted as that husband and wife who were singing in church, "Be not dismayed, what ere be tide. God will take care of you. No matter what may be the test, God will take care of you." The wife looked up to her husband when they had finished the last stanza and said, "Husband, do we really believe that--no matter what may be the test, God will take care of you--do we really believe it; do we really accept it?" They talked late that night. "We do believe it and we accept it no matter what shall come to us--God will take care of us."

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Discouragement can be cured and this question can have an answer to it through faith in God in the unfailling hours of life's discouragement. David kept battling, "Why art thou cast down," he said; "Hope thou in God." He had learned the secret of peace. It was a victory for him.

I should like now for us to turn to the Bible and take three illustrations that I believe will help us to understand this why. One is Gideon, the other Job, and the last, of course is Jesus.

I. Gideon asked the question why

The Book of Judges tells of the land of Israel under the iron rule of the Midianites. Every summer they came raiding in from the country below the Jordan to take off the harvest which the people had gathered. None dared to thresh his grain openly for that would have been inviting trouble. They were afraid. Gideon was secretly threshing grain on his father's farm. He was not threshing with oxen; they tell us that you can still see this done in Palestine, for the animals would have made noise that would have revealed the threshing floor. Therefore, they had to beat it out by hand. It was hard, hot and heavy work.

Gideon was thus occupied in this secret place working oppressed. A stranger suddenly came and stood by the oak under the shade where he was beating out the grain. "The Lord is with Thee, thou mighty man of valour," said the man. At this Gideon looked up in amazement and replied, "Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then has all this befallen us and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of saying 'Did not the Lord bring us out from Egypt.' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the enemy."

It was as if Gideon had answered, "The Lord is with me; it certainly looks like it doesn't it. Here I am compelled to

and a closer conformity to the world.

At the very time of all times in the history of the world her members should be witnessing to the world by showing their loyalty to the church and showing their loyalty by attending the services. But behold the increasing disloyalty and indifference on the part of Christians to the churches. Now this is not just one church, but is true throughout the church universal. The earnest Christian will say within his soul, "Why, oh God, has all of this befallen our church? How long, oh Lord; how long?"

A remarkable thing in the history of Gideon is that when he asked this question of the angel, "Why hath all this befallen us," the angel did not answer him or rather his own answer was, "The Lord looked upon him and said, "Go in this thy might, and thou shall save Israel from the hands of the Midianites. Have not I sent Thee?"

Well, Gideon had looked at the state of his father's house. He had looked at his native land, but the Lord had looked upon Gideon and Gideon had looked upon the Lord.

Courage came to him and it was not long before he had his 300 trumpets and the crash of the 300 pitchers and the flash of 300 lights and the overthrow and the deliverance of his people. In other words, God's answer to Gideon's why to the troubled question about his nation, about his religion--the religion in

his nation--was a command of action. That's what God's answer is to you and to me when we ask the question of Gideon. Our part is to take our place in the ranks and stand for truth and to be for God. Nothing will ever be gained by sitting down and quibbling about non-essentials and asking the question why. The thing for us is "Stand up, stand up for Jesus ye soldiers of the cross". Close up the broken columns and shout through all the hosts. Make good the loss so heavy in those that still remain and prove to all around you, that death itself is gain.

II. Job asked the question why

Job is an eternal symbol of the mystery of this question. There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job and the man was perfect and upright, one who feared God and that hated evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. His substance was also 7,000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 she asses, and a very great household so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

There you have Job--upright, blessed, and a wonderful man, prosperous and a great man, and the greatest in the east. This is the man who was put to the severest of trials. There came a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan came also. He had been going up and down the land. The Lord said to Satan, "Hast thou considered

my servant Job. There is none like him in the earth--he is perfect, he is upright, he fears God, he hates evil." And Satan laughed. "Does he fear God?" The world is always ready to laugh at the motives and professions of faith and those who try to live right. And Satan mocked the pure life of Job. He said to the Lord, "Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and about all his house and about all he has. You have protected him from the storms and the adversities of life. You take your hand away from him and he will curse Thee."

God answered the charges of Satan by giving him permission to work under God's authority to test the righteousness of Job. Satan had Job in his power and had permission to take from him all his possessions but he could not touch Job himself.

Now swiftly the calamities began to fall one after another upon his household. First the messenger came telling that the enemy had driven off his 1000 oxen, 500 of his asses, and had slain his servants with a sword. The first messenger had finished talking and then a second came and told Job that fire had descended from heaven and burned up all his sheep and his shepherds had been destroyed.

A third messenger came and told him that his 3000 camels had been stolen and the drivers slain with a sword.

Not so many years back, we had hoped that the ruin of a World War would teach the nations a more excellent way of peace and that they would come to deal with one another in principles of justice, brotherly love, and good will. But now what do we see in the world?

We see nations are armed as never before and the sparks are flying from the grindstone. The nations hold their breath, dreading what is yet to come. Instead of being discredited and cast aside, the rule of the forces are getting stronger in Europe and around the world in Asia and we have cruel tragedies of violence of force on every hand.

What wonder then that some should ask if God's Holy Spirit is in the world and if God provides over the destinies of men and nations, why has all of this befallen the world.

The same question is on our lips when we look at the Church of Christ in this world. It is still divided by divisions; it is still distressed by heresys and heretics. At the very time when there is a greater need than every before for a faith in the Bible and in the law of God, we find everywhere questioned the truth and the authority of the Scripture.

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very suddenly the grandmother died. He said that all the way back from the funeral he thought about it--what effect will it have on the children; what will happen when they realize that she is gone; how can I explain this to them. "I hope I'll be able to tell them just how to face this." Then he said he came to the time for them to say their prayers and they started off,

"Now I lay me down to sleep" and with a slight pause he said, "They gave the answer to me." "God bless daddy and grandmother in heaven and help make Joan and brother and sister good children. Amen"

Of course we see in this that faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not done. There are a lot of questions why. This matter of immortality. We come now to the last of this mysterious question.

III. Jesus asked the question why.

This is a most mysterious why that was ever spoken upon the earth. This was the sixth hour until the ninth hour when there was darkness over the face of the earth. It was not the darkness of night, but it was sort of an eclipse. It was nature's great protest against the death of Christ, the Maker. Now this period of darkness from the sixth hour until the ninth was a period of silence. None of the seven last words of the cross were spoken at this time, but at the ninth hour Jesus broke the silence and the darkness with His cry, "My God, why

Then a forth messenger came and said that a whirlwind had just wiped out the house of his oldest son and all his sons and daughters were there at a party and the house collapsed.

Yesterday Job, the greatest and richest man indeed; today he's a poor man. Yesterday he had seven sons and three daughters; now he does not have anyone to carry on his name. In a single day all he had was swept away. When Job heard these tidings, he rose and wrent his mantle, shaved his head, fell to the ground and worshiped and resigned to his situation. "Naked came I into this world, and naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave, and the Lord take away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Now Job stood the first test of Satan. In all this Job sinned not.

The second and the most dangerous test followed. The Sons of God again presented themselves and Satan was among them. Satan said, "Job still holds on but I believe I can get him to sin." God said, "You can do everything but destroy him. Just don't touch his life." In other words Satan told

God that Job had been able to retain his faith despite his loss of property and his family, but he would not do so if something happened to his body. Now with this permission Satan went forth and smote the body of Job. Job came down with terrible boils from the soles of his feet to the top of his head; so

terrible was his plight that his wife saw him sitting there in his disease and she advised him to curse God and die. Job stood that test. "What," he said, "shall we receive good at the hand of God and not evil?"

But this does not mean that Job was not troubled in his mind in his distress because his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, came from afar to comfort him. With courtesy they sat there seven days and seven nights in silence side by side with him in his grief. How great it was Job tells us. Now he opened his mouth and cursed the day he was born, but he did not curse the Lord. He regretted that he had had to face these burdens in life. Then comes Job's great why.

"Why died I not from the wound?" And thus he goes on wondering why God gave life to man when life is capable of such pain and agony. Why cannot men die when they long for death? Why is life given to a man whose way is hid?

Thus Job voiced the deepest sorrow and the agony and doubt in the life of a man. That is the theme around the great drama of Job's life. Why of mankind surges and echos through the pages of every book and especially the Book of Job.

And what is the answer? There is no answer. Job's three friends who came there could give the answer and when God answered out of the whirlwind He gave no answer to the deep,

deep question of Job's agony. Yet Job was now left desolate. God gave him faith and that faith is the greatest answer. "But He knoweth the way that I take and when He has tried me I shall come forth as gold."

All that he can do is to put out trust in God and have faith in God and he will come out as pure gold.

A young man we'll call Tom was killed instantly. His death shocked the entire community. Why? Why should such a thing happen? His girlfriend cried, "Why? He was a good boy. Why did he have to go?" His parents mourned, "Why? Why?" Hundreds of people asked the question why. The family group tried to face the question. He was such a good boy. The gas station attendant said, "He certainly was of the best." Former school teachers agreed that he was absolutely a grand person. Now, I do not know the why of a thing like this, but in Tom's case, as someone said, "If ever a fellow was ready to go, it was Tom. He was straight; he was fine; he was clean." We do not find the answer why to all of these questions always.

We forget that Jesus took a little child and answered a lot of questions through them.

There's a story of a man who talked about his own children He said, "They can talk at night, and they can say 'Now I lay me', God bless daddy and grandma and help make Joan and the brothers and sisters good children. Amen" Then one night he

hast Thou forsaken Me."

What was back of that cry? Either Christ was mistaken or was He forsaken? If He was not forsaken, then He was mistaken and we could conclude that the hours of His suffering on the cross had so weakened Him, distracted Him that He had collapsed and God had forsaken Him. Yet, He was not really forsaken; He only thought that God had forgotten and forsaken Him.

But if Jesus was mistaken when He uttered this cry, then this is the only one of the utterances of Jesus which must be withdrawn. The thought that Jesus on the cross was the victim of misunderstanding can never be reconciled with the teaching of the Gospel.

But if Christ was not mistaken in the cry, then He was actually forsaken by God. This experience marked the climax of His suffering for sin. This was the bitter cup which He asked to be delivered from in the garden. Only Christ Himself had a right to ask such a question, for Christ was God's Son. The penalty of sin is death--separation from God. This was the cup that Christ tasted for a moment on the cross. The burden of the world's sin upon Him caused Him to pass out into the lonely darkness. Only that experience can explain the straining of Christ from His death and that agony and blood sweat amid the shadows of Gethsemane. When He cried, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

That experience through which Christ passed on the cross, "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" was the full price of redemption. It shows the measure of God's rath towards sin and, on the other hand, the measure of God's love for man. And that cry brings hope to our salvation. But because Christ asked it in the darkness, you and I need never to ask that question or utter the cry of desolation.

The cross of Christ--that great mystery of mercy and of love, solves all the mysteries when we survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died we know that infinite love is at the heart of things, that all things work together for good unto those who love God.

When God rejected the earnest, longing appeal of Moses His servant to enter the land of promise and buried him on the lonely mountain, perhaps Moses wondered why. But when ages later Moses and Elijah appeared in glory on the mountain, and spoke together with Jesus concerning His approaching death on the cross, I have no doubt but what that Moses felt satisfied with the ways of God.

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