

Even the Dogs Eat the Crumbs: God's Purpose in Affliction; Mark 7:24-30
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Now that we have understood what's happening in the passage, why Jesus goes to Tyre and Sidon, why he treats the woman as he does. Now that we've understood what's happening, now we can ask the passage, okay, passage, what application do you have for our lives? Last week we said that there are three, there's more than three, but there's at least three main foundational applications for the passage that we can easily see.

We are going to briefly look at the first one. Now, the first one is so obvious that all of you as children of God and students of the Word, all of you will readily see this. And so I'm just going to point this out, and I'm just going to sort of outline it for you in about 30, 35, 40 seconds. And then you yourself can take this in your time of meditation and you can reflect upon this and you can see this just as well for yourself as I can show you.

And so the first application, the first thing to see is that this woman is an illustration of saving faith. This woman is a demonstration, she is a manifestation of true and saving faith. That's not hard to see because in Matthew's account, Jesus says as much. He says, O woman, great is your faith. One of only two people in all of the scriptures in which Jesus praises their faith.

The other being the centurion, also a Gentile, also coming to Jesus for Jesus to perform a healing on someone that's not there. But the two instances in which Jesus praises a human's faith, one of them is right here, reminding us, of course, of that great statement that all of us hope to hear one day. Well done, good and faithful servant.

In a similar way, he says, Oh, woman, great is your faith. So clearly. She is an illustration of saving faith for us in so many ways. She is this illustration of saving face faith. First of all, what drives her to Jesus is her recognition of a deep, true, felt need. Saving faith is a faith that drives us to Christ from the context or from the basis of a felt need.

No one comes to faith in Christ. Without experiencing or without realizing a deep need, a deep lack within yourself. Secondly, her faith is a faith that was awakened by her hearing of Jesus. Faith is always awakened by hearing of Jesus. Romans 10 faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.

Thirdly, her faith was a faith that was informed by the truth of Scripture. In Matthew's account, she calls Jesus the son of David. Where in the world did she hear this? Canaanite woman living in Tyre and Sidon, where in the world did she hear of Jesus as the son of David? We don't know, but she has heard at least something of him and her thoughts of Jesus, her opinion of Jesus, her perception of Jesus is shaped to at least some degree by the truth of Scripture because she calls him son of David, which is a highly messianic title.

Also, her faith is a faith that is submissive to the will of Jesus as she says, uh, Jesus so plainly says to her that, uh, it's not right to throw the children's bread to the little dogs. And she answers not to contradict him or not to counteract his argument or, or not to even worse of all. So to get in a huff about this and get all upset and get her get her back up and get her blood pressure up and turn

Around and say well if you're not willing to treat me like a person if you're not willing to treat me like the woman that I am then good riddance to you and then leave that's not what her faith drove her to her faith drove her to submit to what we said last week was the order of salvation which is To the Jew first and then to the Gentile and she submits willingly to that.

Yes, Lord It's just the crumbs from your table. The crumbs from your table are enough for me Also, her faith was a faith that was determined. She would not take no for an answer She was there to get from Jesus. She had heard of this man Jesus Her deep need drove her to come to Jesus, and she was going to leave with Jesus's blessing.

She was going to leave with the healing that she came for. She is like the New Testament version of Jacob. Remember the story as Jacob wrestles with the angel, and he won't let the angel go until the angel blesses him. So she is like a New Testament version of that, that she won't take this no for an answer.

She comes to Him, lastly, believing the three things that all in Mark's gospel have believed all along. All those who come to Jesus, all of them believe at least these three things. That He is able to help me, that He is willing to help me, and that He will make Himself accessible to help me. Everyone who has come to Jesus has believed those three things.

She also believes those three things and she will not allow her belief, her trust, her faith in those three things to be swayed by Jesus apparent rebuttal of her. Because she believes He is able to help her, He is willing to help her, and He will make Himself accessible to help her. That's the first application.

So I'll let you take that and sort of run with it. And we'll leave that for the time being. We want to look at, uh, today, all of our time on the second application. Now the third application, Lord willing, we'll come back to next week. The third application, just to sort of plant this seed in the back of your mind, is that this woman is an illustration of intercessory prayer.

Prevailing intercessory prayer. Because that's what she does. She comes to Jesus, and her request Her request is not for herself, her request is for another, especially her request is for a daughter. She is a parent coming to plead with Jesus on behalf of her daughter. So in this way, she is an illustration of prevailing intercessory prayer.

We will, again, Lord willing, come back to that next week. Today we want to spend all of our time just recognizing how this woman is an illustration of God's purpose, or at least one of God's purposes. In affliction, we want to see her as one of God's purposes, one of God's central main purposes. In affliction, suffering, trials, tribulations, pain, loss, hurt, trials, all these sorts of things.

She is an illustration of what God intends to use those things for in the lives of His sheep, of His people. So let's just begin by just recognizing How she was indeed in a place of great, great affliction, she comes to Jesus, as we said last week, with this deep need for which she is helpless and hopeless.

Her daughter is possessed of a demon. We don't, we're not told. If it's one demon or more than one demon, but she's possessed of a demon. Now this demonic possession we mentioned last week, as we see this in the scripture, we recognize this in the scripture by its manifestations. We recognize demon possession in the scripture because the narrator tells us.

That this person is not suffering from some epileptic fit or some sort of sickness that causes blindness or like the, uh, the, the father of the boy who says, uh, the demon always cast my boy into the fire and he's foaming at the mouth. Instead, we recognize demon man, demon oppression because of not only are we told that, but simply because of the symptoms, the manifestations, the outward manifestations and those outward manifestations.

As we think through some of the episodes that we see in Scripture of demon oppression, the most prominent, of course, the one that we studied some time ago in that man, Legion, who was himself possessed of multiple, multiple demons, so many that they had named themselves Legion. The manifestations that are displayed in that man's life were just pitiable.

The poor wretch of a man and the hideous life that the man lived. Living among the corpses and the rotting flesh of the tombs. Screaming and wailing, we're told, night and day. Crying out and cutting himself. No longer able to maintain clothing on him. And long ago they were no longer able to keep him bound with the ropes and the chains that they were tying him up and chaining him up with.

The manifestations of such a state of human misery. Now, that man was possessed of many, many demons. We're not told of this girl's possession of if there was multiple demons or just one. But here's what we are told in Matthew's gospel. Matthew says it from her words. She says that she is possessed. of a great demon, or literally, she is greatly demonized.

She is severely demonized. In the words of the mother, she is severely demonized. And so we contemplated some last week of just what an affliction that would be. The precious little daughter, we're not told of her age, but this precious little daughter, possessed of such a dark and hideous being. or beings whose goal it is to torture and harm her as much as possible before destroying her.

And to watch this happen to her and to be utterly helpless, there's nothing the mother can do. She can't help her daughter other than maybe hold her down when these demons seem to take over. She can't remove the demon from her daughter. She lives in a culture in which there is no gospel witness, there is no truth witness.

She can't take her to the Temple of Baal and receive any help there. That may be where she was possessed to begin with. And so, her utterly helpless situation, this, this affliction, that is tormenting the mind and the life of this mother. But then this situation, this deep affliction, is combined together with another situation in her life, and the other situation is hearing of Jesus.

Notice how the two of these things come together. Notice how God brings together both of these realities in her life. The reality of a deep trouble, the reality of an infirmity, an affliction, the possession of her precious daughter. And God brings that together with the hearing of this man, Jesus. So let's just let our minds imagine for just a little bit what this would have been like for her.

Imagine her hearing of this man, Jesus, perhaps she's working in the field and the lady working beside her on the row over next to her row starts talking to her and they're talking and the lady says, Have you heard there? There is this Jew far south of us in the land of Galilee and people are talking about this man.

They're saying that this man heals hundreds of people. They're saying that he cleanses lepers. They're saying that he casts out demons. They're saying that his words are like no other man's words. Have you heard of this man? And imagine how the news of that would have landed on her heart in a different way than if her life was all nice and tidy and put together.

Further, imagine how on that fateful day when she hears that this man, Jesus, Jesus is nearby and maybe her friend or maybe a another lady in the village or maybe a family member tells her that man Jesus, Yeshua they call him, he's here, he's come here, and in that moment, that little seed of faith that has gone, as Jesus says, into the ground to die, that little seed of faith for the very first moment , that first little sprig of green pops up out of the ground.

Remember what that was like in school—elementary school, when you get the little styrofoam cup, you put a little dirt in there and you put your seeds in there, you put them on the window sill, and then one day you'd look and there's one little piece of green sticking up? That moment when the faith that was implanted into her soul, into the soil of her heart.

First springs up is the moment when two things come together, the soil and the water come together, the affliction and the news come together to say, I must go to him, I must get to him. He will help me. He can help me. He will not refuse me. It was that moment that that faith sprung forth. Now imagine if either of those two realities were removed.

Imagine if the reality of the news of Jesus was removed and imagine if her life was just this reality of the demonic possession of her daughter and all that her heart, all the soil of her heart had was the affliction or the reverse. Imagine if the only thing that she had was the news of Jesus and let's say that the news of this man, Jesus, who's performing so many mighty works so far south of us.

And this news lands on the life of someone who's enjoying playing with that same little daughter who's running around in the backyard and playing whatever games the Canaanites played and comes and sits on her lap and gives her a hug and says, Mommy, I just love you. This is such a fun day. And then right across from her is her friend sitting and saying, you know, we've heard about this man.

They call him Yeshua. He's doing mighty things. They say, we hear of these incredible things he's doing. And we've heard that he's here. Oh. That's nice. Honey, let's go get dinner on. You see? Either of those things, the soil or the water taken away, and this faith doesn't spring forth. God uses both the affliction and the news of this man Jesus who is able and willing and makes himself accessible.

To those who come to him, and both of those things come together for this powerful conversion. The great compassionate purpose of God in her life through her affliction was to bring forth that which would've never been born out of a life of ease and comfort. Look with me at the words, this is a longer quote, but this is worth reading through.

Words of J. C. Ryle from many years ago. This Canaanite mother, no doubt, had been severely tried. She had seen her darling child vexed with the devil and been unable to relieve her. But yet that trouble brought her to Christ and taught her to pray. Without it, she might have lived and died in careless ignorance and never seen Jesus at all.

Surely it was good for her that she was afflicted. Let us mark this well. There is nothing which shows our ignorance so much as our impatience under trouble. We forget that every cross is a message from God and intended to do us good in the end. Trials are intended to make us think, to wean us from the world, to send us to the Bible, to drive us to our knees.

Health is a good thing, but sickness is far better. If it leads us to God, prosperity is a great mercy, but adversity is a greater one. If it brings us to Christ, anything, anything is better than living in carelessness and dying in sin. Anything is better than living in carelessness and dying in sin.

Better a thousand times be afflicted like the Canaanite mother and like her to flee to Christ. than to live at ease like the rich fool and die at last without Christ and without hope. We must believe that, brothers and sisters, we must believe that to the core of our being. Anything is better than dying in our sin.

A life filled with nothing but the greatest afflictions, a life devoid of all ease, a life devoid of all earthly blessings from the Lord, a life which we could say, surely the Lord did not favor this life. Anything is better than stepping into eternity unprepared for that eternity. A life of hideous affliction is better than that if that affliction combines together with the hearing of Jesus to form within our heart.

It's true and saving faith. Look at the words of Paul on the next page, Philippians chapter three, when he looks at all of the blessings, the earthly accomplishments, the earthly blessings of his life, and he says, Oh, the gain that I had, I count all of that as loss. For the sake of knowing Christ, I look at all that, all those things, and I count them all as rubbish because they were a detriment.

They were a hindrance to my knowing Christ. We see this all throughout Scripture, don't we? We see in the pages of Scripture so many countless examples of how God will use affliction in the lives of people to join together with the hearing of His Word to either bring the lost sinner to Christ or to take the believer...

And move them along the path of sanctification and growth in Christ. We see this so many places in the Bible, don't we? We think about the story of Joseph being cast into the pit, sold as a slave, put in, thrown into prison. We think of Jonah and the fish, and the belly of the fish. We think of Job.

Scratching his skin until it's raw and bleeding. We think of Ruth, Ruth who lost everything. She lost her husband, she lost her family, she lost her home, she lost her culture. The only thing Ruth had was a mother in law that said that she didn't even want her anyway. We think of the stories of Jeremiah, cast into the pit.

We think of Abraham. Abraham, can you imagine that furnace? The furnace of Abraham's life when the Lord God said to him, Abraham. Take that son that you love with all of your heart. Take him to the top of the mountain, plunge your knife into him, and burn his body. We think of the stories of people like Rahab who lost everything.

Or we think of the story of the Apostle Paul as we just read from his words in Philippians chapter 3. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 who gives us this litany list of, this list of all these things, of the beatings, the stonings, the, The beatings with rods, the imprisonments, the hunger, the cold, the shipwreck, all these sorts of things.

In the words of John Piper, John Piper says, if God's love for his children is to be measured by our health, wealth, and comfort in this life, then God hated the Apostle Paul. So we see God use again and again and again, affliction. In the lives of those in the pages of scripture, and he uses it for the purposes of either bringing the lost sinner to know Christ or taking the believer who knows Christ's and weaning from them remaining sin, remaining love for the world, remaining spiritual dullness.

So that's what we want to turn to now. We want to just reflect for just a few minutes on how God uses affliction. But before we do that, just let's just recognize, first of all, that God's not the only one that uses affliction. We could put it either way. We could say sin or we could say Satan. Sin within us, the sin remaining in us, or Satan, our enemy.

They will also use affliction in our lives, but they use affliction in a very different way. Look at Psalm 34 and verse 21. Affliction will slay the wicked. Affliction will slay the wicked. Why will affliction slay the wicked? Because the wicked experience affliction, and they do one of two things. They might pray and ask God to remove the affliction from them.

And when God doesn't do that, then it hardens their heart and they use that as justification. To justify their failure to believe and their failure to, to yield or, so they either do that, they ask God, they, they look at their lives and they, they want their lives to be more full of earthly blessing and less full of earthly, uh, un or discontent or, or pain or suffering.

And they ask God for that. And God doesn't bless them in earthly ways like they desire, and they use that as justification for unbelief. Or they look at all of the affliction in the world, all the suffering in the world, and they lay all of that at God's feet. And they use that as justification for unbelief.

So either way, sin within our heart and our enemy Satan, they use affliction to destroy the wicked, to slay the wicked, because that affliction It's what's used to justify unbelief and hatred of God. It's like the soil. Remember the shallow soil as we were back in Chapter 4 looking at that parable of Jesus, the parable of the soils.

And we talked about how all four of those, when the plant springs up, all three times that the plant springs up, it's always a metaphor of faith that makes a profession of belief. So when the plant springs up, it's like the profession of belief, and what always happens right after that, the sun comes up.

The plant professes belief, the sun comes up, the sun of affliction, the sun of, the sun, S U N, of trials, comes up, and the shallow soil That plant then dies. And we said very specific, very, very specifically then that the cause of the death of the plant was not the sun. The cause of the death of the plant was the lack of soil.

It was just the sun that brought that out. And so in the same way, this is the same sort of truth that the sun of affliction and pressure from the world and suffering and discontentment and dissatisfaction and trials. All of that comes to all people, and for the wicked, that ends up in their destruction or their undoing.

But now, let's look at God's purpose in affliction, or at least some of God's purposes in affliction. So first of all, just recognize with me that God is the God who brings calamity. The sun of affliction

comes up. Because God makes that sun come up, we read in Isaiah chapter 45 verse 7. God says this, I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity.

I create calamity. I am the Lord and I do all these things. So we don't do any sort of gymnastics with the word. We don't play any sort of tricks with the word and we don't, we don't try to make the scriptures say. What so often we as Christians want the scriptures to say, which is to say, to relieve God of the burden of being seen as the one who brings affliction to our life.

We don't do that. We don't look at the word and ask the scriptures to relieve God of the responsibility of bringing affliction to our life when the scriptures themselves say that God does this. He is the one that brings calamity. He is the one that brings affliction. Now, sometimes we might say, well, We're not sure if God is the one who brings that affliction or God is the one who allows the affliction to come to us Right.

It's like the question about Job where where Satan is the one bringing the affliction But it was God himself who said hey, what have you ever thought about my servant Job? So either way God is sovereign over his universe Nothing happens in his universe outside of his control So if affliction comes to us It is God who is ultimately behind that.

And so God is the one who says Himself, I bring calamity. And if God brings calamity, then calamity coming from His hand is a good thing. It is a necessary thing, and it is a good thing because we're told, for example, in places like James 1 and verse 17, every good gift comes from God. And so if God brings the calamity into our life, it is a blessing from his hand.

It is a thing that he uses. It is a tool that is useful for him, for his glory, and for our benefit. I think back to a flip to Philippians chapter 1 verse 20, 29. That's a powerful passage to me, because in that passage, Paul says this, for it has been granted. And you might remember about three years ago when we were in Philippians, we looked at that word and we saw that that's the word '*echaristhe*.'

And you can even hear in that word '*echaristhe*,' you can hear *charis*. Anybody know what the Greek word *charis* is? It's the word for grace. And so Paul literally says, God has graced you. And what has he graced you with? Two things, he says. Belief in his name and suffering. God has graced you with suffering for his name.

God has gifted you. He has granted to you. He has blessed you. with this blessing of belief in his name and suffering for his sake. Now look with me at Job chapter 36 in verse 15. This is a powerful verse of scripture. He delivers the afflicted by their affliction. And he opens their ear by adversity. Now we'll get to the second half of that a little bit later in the message, but the first half of that, he delivers the afflicted by their affliction.

It doesn't say he delivers the afflicted from their affliction. He delivers the afflicted by their affliction. How can God deliver the afflicted by their affliction? How does God do that? What does that even mean? How do you make sense of that? How do you deliver afflicted from their affliction by their affliction?

The only way that makes sense, the only way that makes sense is this. The affliction that he delivers the afflicted from is worse than what he delivers them from. Let me say that a little bit

more clearly because I didn't quite say that clearly. What he delivers them from is worse than the affliction that he uses to deliver them with.

That was a little clearer, wasn't it? You could follow what I was saying there. What he delivers them from is worse than the affliction that he uses to deliver them. That's the only way that makes sense. For the afflicted to be delivered by their affliction means that the affliction is delivering them from something far worse than they would have ended up with if God hadn't delivered them by means of their affliction.

And so that's what we're going to look at. How God delivers us, and He delivers us with afflictions that are far, far better than what He delivers us from.

This woman comes to Jesus in a desperate state, and all of us recognize desperation, don't we? Don't you recognize desperation in your life? You ever been desperate? You ever been desperate for something? For some answered prayer? for some deliverance. Desperation is a powerful thing. Desperation can cause us to do things that we wouldn't normally be able to do.

We've all heard the stories, haven't we, of the wreck on the side of the highway and the guy that lifts the car off the person pinned underneath? Well, we've heard stories of how people might act in situations of combat or situations of life-threatening situations. And the truth is, the reality is, is that desperation is a powerful, powerful thing.

And so for that, we are tremendously grateful that the tool of desperation is in the hands of such a good God. Can you imagine the power of desperation? If it weren't being used by God for what he promises are good purposes. Can you imagine the destructiveness of desperation? When it's being used by those who hate you or those who are opposed to you.

But we're so thankful that God will use desperation like in the woman's life, like in your life. Like in mine. He will use desperation, but he will use it by his good hands, his gracious, loving, wise hands, and he will use it for our good. So let's look at how he uses it. He uses it, first of all, to deliver us from spiritual indifference.

God uses affliction to deliver us from spiritual indifference. Look at Genesis, I'm sorry, Genesis, Luke 16 and verse 25. We are familiar with this parable. This is the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. And we know the story here as the Lazarus is then in the bosom, metaphorically in the bosom of Abraham, which is a metaphor for being in the presence of God as he is in the bosom of Abraham.

Abraham then says to the rich man who is pleading for mercy, child, remember that in your lifetime you received good things. You receive good things, but Lazarus, in like manner, he received bad things. So the good things that the rich man received through his life lulled him into spiritual indifference, which was the cause of him being where he was, and it was the affliction of Lazarus that awakened his soul from spiritual indifference so that he would then go to be with his Lord, his savior, after his brief time of suffering was over in her book Evidence, not Seen Darlene Diler Rose, who was a missionary into a small, primitive.

Ireland tribe of people, just prior to World War II, her and her husband go to this primitive island, and there are missionaries there in the South Pacific. And the outbreak of World War II was

coming, and friends and family back home warned her, you need to get out. You need to come home. Things are getting ugly in the Pacific.

They don't. They are then overrun and captured by the Japanese. They become POWs, her and her husband. Her husband doesn't survive the war. He's killed in a POW camp. But Darlene survives the war. And she survives the war in one of the most gruesome POW camps of the Japanese. We're all probably familiar with the reputation of the POW camps of the Japanese in World War II.

So she survives that under harsh, brutal, bitter, inhumane conditions. And she writes in her book that she wouldn't have traded that experience for anything. That at the conclusion of the war, when she finally is nursed back to health, She didn't, she wasn't even strong enough to make the flight back to the States after her liberation.

She had to be nursed back to health in the Philippines for almost a year. And then finally she's strong enough to make the trip back to the States, which was by boat. And then she comes back and all her friends and family are around her and they're saying, Darlene, we wish you'd just listened to us. We just wish you'd listened and gotten out in time and you would have spent the war here with us in the States.

She says, no way. There's no way. There's no way I would have traded the sweetness of Christ

There's no way I would have traded that experience of knowing him like that for the safety of being stateside for all those years. Because she had the spiritual indifference, the spiritual dullness, literally beaten from her through these afflictions. Matthew 19, verses 23 and 24, Jesus says to his disciples, Truly I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.

In the Gospels, we see rich people and not just in the Gospels in the epistles to particularly James's epistle. We see the rich person, the rich man as a metaphor for the one who has a life of ease, the one who has earthly blessings, earthly favor, and one whose life is empty, largely empty of those afflictions for which there's no way out because the rich man or the rich woman can buy their way out or get their way out of most of these afflictions.

And so in scripture, the rich man is oftentimes just a picture of the one who has the benefit of a life of earthly ease and comfort. Remember the rich young ruler who would not give up his riches to follow Christ. And so that is this metaphor, this picture of what lulls us into spiritual indifference.

Like the parable, as J. C. Ryle alluded to earlier, the parable of the rich man whose harvests were so great and so plentiful that his problem was, how am I going to store all these harvests, all these harvests, all these harvests? How am I going to store all this? I got to build bigger barns. To which the parable then answers, you fool.

Because this very night, your life, your soul will be demanded of you. Acts 14 and verse 22, Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. Affliction has a way of powerfully driving from us spiritual indifference, spiritual dullness, the greatest condemnation of the church.

You might think of a Revelations chapter 3. Remember in Revelation 3, Jesus has those seven churches that he's got those seven powerful words for. And the last one is the harshest one of all.

The last word is the harshest, strictest, most direct word. And that of course is to the church at Laodicea. And Jesus words to that church are, I know your works, you are neither hot nor cold.

Would that you were either hot or cold, so because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spew, or spit, or literally vomit you out of my mouth. And why, why would, does Jesus find them so offensive? What is the reason for their lukewarm spiritual condition, for their spiritual lackadaisicalness?

Jesus says, For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Jesus says himself, you, this is what you're saying. You look at your earthly possessions, your earthly life, and you find a life of ease and comfort, and that life of ease and comfort, you've allowed it to instill within you this spiritual dullness that Jesus calls lukewarmness.

But affliction sharpens that. Affliction drives that out. It sharpens our spiritual perceptions. Look at Isaiah 30 verses 20 and 21. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction. Notice those two phrases, the bread of adversity. In scripture, bread is always a blessing.

You have been given the bread of adversity and the water of affliction. Yet your teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your teacher, and your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, This is the way, walk in it. So the bread of affliction and the water of trouble, the water of affliction, the bread of adversity, what do those bring?

They bring the situation in which the teacher is seen and heard, our eyes see him, our ears hear him, and they hear him say, This is the path, walk in it. Do you see how the spiritual dullness is driven from us by the bread of affliction, and the, oh sorry, the bread of adversity and the water of affliction.

Job 36 and verse 15, once again, he delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ears by adversity. He opens their ears by adversity. In Scripture, the opening of the ears is always indicative of the heart and the soul that becomes perceptive to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Psalm 119, verse 67, Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep your word.

A few verses later, verse 71, It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. Affliction drives from us the spiritual dullness. For That can be the spiritual death of us. We all are familiar with the gentleman, or at least his name, or the one who wrote the poem that would become our national anthem, Star Spangled Banner.

Francis Scott Key, you remember that? Well, Francis Scott Key also wrote some other hymns and some other songs, and among the hymns that he wrote was a little known hymn to us in the modern age here by the name of With Glowing Heart I Praise Thee. Look at this one stanza that I pulled from this, from this hymn.

Praise the grace whose threats alarmed thee, roused thee from thy fatal ease. Isn't that a beautiful way of putting it? Praise the grace whose threats alarmed thee, roused thee from thy fatal ease. I don't know about you, but I'm reminded of the words of another hymn writer by the name of John Newton who wrote The world's most famous, most well-known hymn, among many others.

Amazing Grace, when that song, It was grace that taught my heart to what? Fear. It was grace that taught my heart to fear. Your greatest enemy is not affliction. Your greatest enemy is apathy. Your greatest enemy is spiritual dullness and spiritual apathy and spiritual indifference. And that is one of the things that God drives from us.

We're going to start with affliction also affliction awakens us to remaining sin affliction awakens our heart to remaining sin. Look at 2nd Corinthians 1 verses 8 and 9 for we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.

But that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. So we often talk about that passage in a positive way. And we say God used affliction in Paul's life to bring about a deeper trust and a deeper reliance on God. Which is true, that's absolutely true. Paul says we suffered this affliction, we're not told what it is, but it was so powerful, so, so dark, so dim, so frightening, so heavy, that Paul says, We thought we were done.

We thought it was over with. But Paul, looking back, says the way that God used that was to cause us not to rely on ourself, but on God. So we think about that in a positive way, that Paul's trust in God was strengthened, but there's also a negative side to that. And the negative side is the sin of trusting in self.

The sin of trusting in self. Look at the words of Jeremiah 17 in verse 5 cursed is the man who trusts in man And so it is sinful for the Christian to trust in self and this particular adversity in Paul's life Served to drive from him the sin of trusting in self And to replace it, if you will, with the righteousness of trusting in God.

So sin can drive from us our remain, or I'm sorry, adversity, can drive from us our remaining sin. Think back to the water, the night on the water, the waves, and how we said, we, we, we drew this analogy of the sin, the remaining sin in our life, and we talked about sediment in water, a container of water with sediment in it.

And when that water sits still, all the settlement settles to the bottom, and you look at that jar of water, and it looks nice and clear and clean, until you take it and shake it up. And that was like the affliction of the disciple's life. The remaining sin that had settled to the bottom, and they forgot all about it, the storm shook it up, and you could see it real easily then.

That's what affliction can do for us. So affliction can stir that up. It can prick our consciousness and it also can drive from us our remaining sin. Look at Hosea 2, verses 5 7. For their mother has played the whore. This is a metaphor for Israel here. Their mother has played the whore. She has conceived them and has acted shamefully.

For she said, I will go after my lovers, meaning idols here, idolatry, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink. Therefore, I, this is God speaking, I will hedge her, uh, her way up with thorns. You can read affliction there. I will hedge her way up with thorns. I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her sinful paths.

She shall pursue her sinful lovers but not overtake them. And she shall seek them but shall not find them. Then she shall say And I will go and return to my first husband, Yahweh, for it was better for

me then, than now. Do you see how God uses affliction to drive from Israel this sin or to prevent her from further sin?

Let me just read a quick section here from. A Puritan by the name of John Flavel. This is from a book, I've mentioned this book to you recently, that God is, uh, blessing me with. It's a book called, uh, Keeping the Heart. This one little section he titles, Afflictions can be an answer to prayer. Just listen to his words here.

It would also calm our hearts under adversity to consider that God, using such humble providences, may be accomplishing the very thing that you have longed, prayed, and waited for. And should you be troubled by that, Tell me, Christian, do you not have many prayers offered before God on such accounts as these that He would keep you from sin, that He would reveal the emptiness and insufficiency of the flesh, that He would kill and mortify your lusts, and that your heart may never find rest and any enjoyment but Christ?

You hear that? He says, Christian, don't you pray for holiness? Don't you pray for righteousness of life? Sure you do. If you're a child of God, you pray for righteousness of life. In fact, by such humbling and impoverishing strokes, God may be fulfilling your desires. Would you be kept from sin? Look, He has hedged up your way with thorns.

Referring to Hosea 2 verse 6. Would you see the emptiness of the flesh? Your affliction is a fair glass to discover it. Your affliction is a fair or a clear glass, or mirror in those days, to discover the remaining sin that your very prayers have been asking God to remove. It is a fair glass to discover it, for the insufficiency of the flesh is never so effectively and sensibly discovered as when it is your own experience of it.

Would you have your corruptions mortified? This is the way. God takes away the food and the fuel that maintains them. For just as prosperity conceived and fed them, so also adversity, when sanctified, is a means to kill them. He says, Christian, don't you pray for holiness of life? Could it be that God is answering that very prayer by taking from your life the food that is nourishing the sin and instead impoverishing you, or so you might think, with that which would starve the sin, the very sin that you've asked Him to remove?

Because affliction will drive from us our remaining sin. Also, affliction delivers us from loving the world and instills within us a love for God. Affliction has a way of driving from us our love for the world and replacing it with a love for God. If we are children of the living God, then our scriptures tell us, so it says in John chapter 1, John chapter 2 verse 15, do not love the world.

Do not love the world and the things in it. Instead, affliction will drive that from us because all of us have a heart that is prone to wander, as the songwriter says, is prone to wander. We are prone to once again fall back in love with the world, to once again fall back in love with lives of comfort and ease and earthly blessings.

And affliction is a tool that God uses to drive that love of the world from us. 2 Corinthians 4, verse 17 and 18. For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. As we look not only to the things that are seen, but to those things that are unseen.

For the things that are seen are temporary, the things that are unseen are eternal. This light momentary affliction is driving that from us, and it's preparing for us an eternal weight of glory

beyond all comparison. So Paul makes a definite connection between afflictions in this life, in which we look to Christ.

Remember Paul says as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen as we look to Christ Afflictions are Creating for us an eternity. That's greater an experience of eternity That is more satisfying more joyful and more fulfilling. So how does that work? How do afflictions create for you a greater eternity?

Afflictions are not Changing the reality of eternity. Afflictions, the afflictions that we suffer, if we look to Christ in our afflictions, God is not watching this occur in our lives and then saying, Oh, let me make this form in heaven. Let me let me change the heavenly reality for them. Our afflictions are not changing the objective experience of heaven.

Our afflictions are changing the subjective Preparation for those experiences. Our afflictions, Paul says it, are preparing. And the preparation is the preparation of teaching our heart to value heavenly things instead of earthly things. To value the eternal and thereby our experience of it. We'll be all the more sharpened and heightened and blessed.

We're all familiar, of course, with the reality that, uh, water never tastes so sweet as when you're thirsty, right? Food never tastes so good as when you're famished. Sleep never feels so good as when you're exhausted, right? We all know these realities. The same reality on the spiritual level is what Paul's talking about.

He's saying afflictions are preparing your heart for an experiencing of eternity that is sharpened and heightened and more aware of the blessedness of that eternity. And that preparation can only take place here because preparations can only take place in advance. By definition, preparations can only be made in advance, as Jesus will say.

In Matthew's gospel, seek not, uh, seek first the kingdom of heaven and all these things will be added unto you. For where your treasure is, that's where your heart will be also. This is the time of preparation to prepare the heart for that. Now what can often get us confused is how Forgetful. We are. We experienced the separation of a loved one, and then they're coming back together with that loved one is is sweet and precious.

But we forget that, don't we? We forget that preciousness. Why do we forget it? We forget it because of our fallen sinful hearts. Forgetfulness is a product of sin. When we reach that eternity, our earthly forgetfulness is gone and God will take a lifetime of affliction in which you have looked to Christ.

He will take a lifetime of affliction and bring all of that to bear upon your experiencing of eternity. That's why Paul can say every light momentary affliction in this life is preparing a greater experience of eternity. Our greatest good is to have this driven from us, that we may know him, to have our love for this world driven from us, to have our remaining love for sin driven from us, to have our spiritual dullness driven from us, that we may know him.

That is our greatest good, and that is what God is seeking by using this affliction in our lives. Philippians 3 in verse 10, as Paul says, that I may know him, that I may know him and notice the context of knowing him and the power of his resurrection and may share in his sufferings becoming like him in his death.

Let me end with this story of, of a lady, Vaneetha Rendall Risner.

Vaneetha Rendall Risner is a hard name to remember, but the story of her life is an easy story to remember. You may remember about three years ago, as we were studying Philippians 1, verse 29, we talked about her. She had written a book, now she's written a couple more, but at the time she had written a book, the name of it was *The Scars That Have Shaped Me*.

And this book is the story of her life, it's the story of how God has used affliction in her life. And so, When I relate to you her story, you, you will recognize right away that this is a person who has experienced deep affliction from the hand of God and has been shaped profoundly by that Vanni was born in India, and as God would have it, just a day before her polio vaccine, she contracted polio.

Now, this is a, an age in which polio is easily. Avoid it, and when it's contracted, it's easily, rather easily treated. However, after contracting polio, the doctor misdiagnosed her symptoms, and instead of effectively treating the polio, the polio set in, and she became almost instantly an infant paraplegic.

Well, she began a long process of painful surgeries. They began in India, and then she moved, her family moved to England. Later they moved to Canada, later they moved to the United States, and through all that moving process, she experienced some 23 surgeries on her legs. Eventually, they were able to restore some small amount of usability to her legs, and she could eventually walk with a very, very pronounced limp, but it was very painful, involving 23 surgeries on the legs.

And throughout all this time, she could barely walk, and when she could walk, it was very, very obvious that she was... And the word that she says in her book that she heard every day of her life, crippled. And so she speaks of the horrible bullying that took place there in India at first. And then in England, as not only was she a crippled, but she was a foreigner crippled.

Later in Canada, as she was not only a crippled, but a foreigner crippled. And then later in the United States, as she was still a crippled, but, still a foreigner crippled and the horrendous, terrible bullying and the horrendous scars that resulted all over her legs, 23 surgeries on her legs and the horrendous scarring, how she would avoid any showing of her leg.

You can, you can imagine young teenage girl going to the pool, the gym, all those things with hideous scars all over her legs, tremendous, not just physical pain, but emotional pain. She, she would write in her book that she found great peace and solitude. In the hospital, because in the hospital, although it involved another painful surgery and another painful recovery, at least she wasn't being bullied.

Well, eventually, at about age 13, she was able to somewhat walk, and then she begins progressing through life. Later on, she marries, suffers four miscarriages. Finally, she gives birth to a son, names him Paul. He was, upon birth, diagnosed with congenitive heart failure or problem. Which they corrected. This was by this time she was living in the United States.

And so they corrected it with open heart surgery on a two day old baby. Correcting the heart problem, in fact correcting it so well. He was doing so well and beginning to thrive that as Paul was two months old, his cardiologist went on vacation. And as it would have it, During that vacation,

she had an appointment, and she came and saw the stand in, the fill in cardiologist, pediatric cardiologist, who, once again, misdiagnosed and thought that two month old Paul was now doing so well that they'd need to take him off of all of his medications.

He was dead two days later. Well, her suffering continues. Later on, she is diagnosed. Now she has, later in life, she's got two daughters that are physically healthy. They are now in their teenage years, and she's diagnosed with something called Post Polio Syndrome. Post Polio Syndrome is an extremely rare condition that only affects those who have been affected by polio.

But among a small percentage of people who have had polio, this Post Polio Syndrome sets in. And as she describes it in her book, she says, It's like all of your energy and all of your body's healing ability. It's like a checking account in which you can only make withdrawals. You cannot make deposits.

And so her body literally has a finite amount of energy. And the doctors, once they diagnosed this, they acted radically. They said, we must stop. You must stop all unnecessary activity because it is literally as though when you cook dinner, that's one less dinner you can cook. That's one dinner closer that you are to being.

permanently in a wheelchair and unable to feed yourself. They said if you don't greatly curb all of your activity, you will be in a wheelchair by your age 40, unable to feed yourself. So immediately, no more hobbies. Nothing fun. No going anywhere for fun, no doing anything for pleasure. Immediately, all of her activities must be managed.

As you can imagine, just like I've got a limited number of times I can lift my arm, I've got a limited number of times I can walk up and go to the bathroom by myself. And as this, the reality of this life altering disease is taking effect, her husband unexpectedly leaves her. And homeschooled.

So you can see that this is a woman who knows affliction and knows it deeply and knows it intimately. Most likely more intimately than anyone in the room knows affliction. In her book she writes of just such desperate times and how her life was just one episode after another of not only disappointment and pain and suffering but a deep lack, a deep emotional lack, that she experienced from all the bullying and all the, all the, all of the affliction that had been heaped upon her.

And so, in her late teenage years, all of this affliction has really just reached a point at which she can no longer take it. She, she must, and maybe someone in the room can relate to this, she must know, for sure, If there really is a God, and if there is a God, why is this God bringing so much pain and suffering into our life?

You might can relate to that just needing to just put that issue to rest once and all once and for all is there really a God and if so, why is he so cruel to me? So like many people in such a situation you may have done this yourself You may have heard of someone doing this in your life someone that you know of She lies in bed one night And all of this has reached an apex and a climax and it's just boiling over and she prays to God and she says, God, if you are real, you must show me.

If you really exist, you must show me. You know what happened? Nothing. Rolls over and goes to sleep thinking, well, there's my answer. There is no God. Wakes up the next morning, still in pain

and all the affliction and all the suffering as before. But somehow the issue is just still not put to rest. She still just can't let it go.

And she feels like she has to know for sure. Is there really a God? So she does what many unbelievers do. Perhaps many Christians also do this as well. She wants answers, so she gets a Bible and does, you guessed it, starts flipping to random passages. Which is not the way to study your Bible, by the way.

But isn't that often the way that unbelievers approach the Scriptures? And often the way that Christians approach the Scriptures, too. Just opening to random passages. So she begins opening to random passages, just looking for an answer. Is this God for real? So guess what book she turns to? Leviticus.

Reads random passages in Leviticus, makes no sense of anything. Finally, in her frustration, she says, I guess there's my answer again. But still the answer, she's still not put to rest. So she turns to another book. You know what the second book is she turns to? First Chronicles. And begins reading random passages of endless genealogies.

Thinking to herself, this is just foolish. There is no God. He's not real. This is my answer. Well, I can't, can I not just accept this and move on? So she closes her Bible and in tears, you guessed it, still just can't put the issue to rest. So she opens her Bible one more time, one last time, promising herself this is the last time.

She opens her Bible to this story. As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth, and his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he might be born blind? Jesus answered, It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

And just like the woman, the Syrophenician woman, Whom God endowed with immediate spiritual comprehension. God endowed her with similar immediate spiritual comprehension. She writes that she immediately understood what God was saying. She immediately understood that the disciples were asking for the cause.

What's the cause of this affliction? But Jesus's answer wasn't what the cause is. Jesus's answer is what the result is. The result is His glory. And from that moment, she knew. I don't know how, other than a Holy Spirit thing. From that moment, she knew that 1856.

A hymn writer by the name of Elizabeth Prentiss wrote a hymn that probably most of us are familiar with. The name of the hymn is *More Love to Thee*. I'll pull from it this one final stanza. Let sorrow do its work, send grief and pain. Sweet are thy messengers, sweet their refrain. When they can sing with me, more love, O Lord, to thee.

More love to thee. More love to Thee. So I just asked you, Christian, can your heart sing that stanza? More sorrows, more sorrows, Lord, if they bring more love for you. More grief, because the messengers of sorrow and grief, they produce within my heart this cry, more love to Thee.