

The Furnace of Affliction
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May 2003

Open your Bibles to James 5. I will read a passage from Isaiah first. Isaiah 48:10: *Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.* Now, let us read James 5:10-11: *Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.*

Our Father, bless the reading of Thy Word this morning. Strengthen us I pray. Give us listening ears and submissive hearts. May Jesus Christ be honored. In His name, we pray, Amen.

The title of my message today is, "The Furnace of Affliction." I spoke a couple of Sundays ago on, "Cares of this Life." Then, I spoke on, "Detours, Delays, and Denials." Last Sunday, I spoke on, "The Storms of Life." Today, I will speak on another facet of Christian living, "The Furnace of Affliction." I will close this series next Sunday morning on the subject, "The Sentence of Death." That is not what you think it is. This morning, I will speak on, "The Furnace of Affliction." The furnace speaks of confinement; the door is closed. It is an inescapable circumstance. What is inside is locked inside. The fire of affliction speaks of indescribable anguish and suffering. Egypt's treatment of the children of Israel was referred to three times as the iron furnace of Egypt. You read about the suffering of their life down in Egypt. God referred to it three times to remind Israel of it. It was so important. Many Christians believe that faith in God's promises will protect them from life's hardships. Their diseases will be healed. Their bank accounts will swell. They will live to be ninety years old in perfect health. They can confidently sing, "Something good is gonna happen to you today." That is not Biblical. That may sound good; but it is a false theology. When things do not come out that way, we lose our confidence and faith in God because we are expecting something that God has not promised in our lives or in our society. We live in a society that works hard to have a pain-free society. I do not know anybody that likes pain. If you do, then there is something wrong with you. I am no hero in pain. I do not like pain. I do not like to cause pain. Someone once described a painless society like this: "One wonders what will become of a society in which certain forms of suffering are avoided. In keeping with middle class ideals, I have in mind a society in which a marriage that is perceived as unbearable quickly and smoothly ends in divorce. After divorce, no scars remain. Relations between all generations are dissolved as quickly as possible without a trace. Periods of mourning are sensibly short. With haste, the handicapped and sick are removed from the house, and the dead are removed from the mind. If changing marriage partners happens as readily as trading in an old car for a new one, then the experiences that one had in the unsuccessful relationship remain unproductive. From such suffering, nothing is learned, and nothing is to be learned." Parents, in our hearts we want to spare our children from the hardships that we had. The hardships that we had made us what we are today. We do them wrong. We shelter. We spare. We do not want them to hurt. We had this. We overdo it. The things that make people is this matter of hardships. Our generation will vote for the one who keeps him from suffering the least. I firmly believe that. When I had a heart cauterization, I got a good report. The doctor came in and said, "I am Doctor Feel-Good. I will not let you suffer." I said, "You are just the kind of doctor I am looking for." Everybody is looking for Doctor Feel-Good. I am not going back to a doctor that makes me feel bad or hurts me. Pain – deliver us from pain.

Notice the protection of pain or the blessing of pain. Pain is a necessity in our world. It is an absolute necessity. If you say, "I want a body in which there will never be any pain," you do not know what you are asking for. Dr. Philip Yancey wrote a book about our body entitled *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*. In the book, he tells about his experience. He says, "I had knit a professional career devoted to people with leprosy whose main defect is an absence of pain." What is the main problem of a leper? It is the absence of pain. He gives a story about a man that

he spent four years with. He said, "When I think of pain, I prefer to think of an individual instead of a group of people." Then he calls this man's name, Uppercast. He was a man from India. He said his name was Saddam – not the man we are hearing about in the news. "His feet had shrunk to half their normal length, and his fingers were shortened and paralyzed. It took us nearly two years of unflagging effort to stop the pattern of destruction in his feet. Meanwhile, we began reconstructing his hands, a finger at a time attaching the most useful tendons to the most useful digits, and retraining his mind to control the new set of connections. Saddam spent four years with me in rehabilitation. He personified the soft spoken, gentle Indian spirit. Together we wept at poor failures and rejoiced at the gradual successes. I came to love Saddam as a friend. At last he was ready to go back into society. He wanted to go back home to his family. 'I want to go back where I was rejected before. I am not so deformed now, and I want to try my way in the great city of Matris.' Before we left, we reviewed the dangers he might encounter since he had no warning system of pain. Any sharp or hot object could harm him. So having learned to care for himself in the hospital workshop, he felt *confident*. *He boarded a train to Matris. Saturday night, he got there and spent it in reunion with his family. He ate dinner with them. Then he went to his old room where he had not slept for four years. He laid down on a woven pallet on the floor and drifted off to sleep with great peace and contentment. He was back home and was fully accepted once more. He got up the next morning. When he awoke and examined himself as he had been trained to do at the hospital, he recalled with horror part of the back of his left index finger was mangled. He knew the culprit because he had seen many such injuries on other patients. Evidence was clear. Telltale drops of blood, marks in the dust, and of course, the decimated clump of tendon and flesh that had been so carefully reconstructed some months before proved that a rat had visited him during the night and gnawed his finger. That is not the end. Immediately he thought, 'What will the doctors say?' All that day he agonized. He decided to go back to the hospital. Then he said, 'No, they asked me to stay the weekend. So he looked in vain that day for a rat trap, so he could sleep at night. He could not find a rat trap, so he sat up all night long to guard against any further injuries. He sat up all Sunday night with his legs crossed on his pallet and his back against the wall. He studied an accounting book with the light of a kerosene lantern. At about four o'clock in the morning, his eyes fell heavy, and he could no longer fight off sleep. The book fell forward onto his knees; his hands slid over to one side against the hot glass of the kerosene lamp. When he awoke the next morning, he saw instantly a large patch of skin had burned off the back of his right hand. He sat trembling in bed, despair growing like a tumor inside him. He stared at his hand, the one melted down to the tendons. He had learned the dangers and difficulties of leprosy. Now he was devastated by the sight of two damaged hands. 'How can I face Dr. Brown?' When he got back to the hospital, he wept, and Dr. Brown wept with him. He poured his misery and said, 'I feel like I have lost all of my freedom. How can I be free without pain? How can I be free without pain?'"* Let me go a little further on this. He talks about the leper. At its most basic level, pain serves as a signal that something is wrong like a smoke alarm that goes off with a loud noise whenever the danger of fire reaches a certain level. Saddam nearly lost his hands because he lacked such a signal. The rest of his body was out of contact with his hands – no pain. He speaks of spraining the ankle. Well, if you do not hurt, you just keep on walking. What happens? You just ruin the foot – no pain. You stick your finger in the fire, and if you do not feel anything, what happens? You burn that hand. He said, "There are those who violate instructions, and they will show off and stick needles through their hand and thorns through their hands and pick up hot coals and all that." They are damaging themselves. Why are they doing it? They are doing it to show that really this is not a part of them: "I do not feel anything; so it is not part of me." I had pain that sent me to the hospital, and what happened? I had my gall bladder taken out. It hurt. The pain told me that something was wrong. If you did not have a pain system, and you had an appendicitis attack, and the thing ruptured, you would die cause you did not know there was pain there. Pain is a necessary part of this life, and it is a signal that something is wrong. Something is wrong – pain in marriage, pain in business, pain in my body, and pain in the home. We have pain to get our

attention. Something is wrong. This book describes all the things that happened because they did not know they were hurt. They continued to hurt themselves because of the absence of pain. We want life without pain. You cannot have it in a fallen world. Listen. You can live easier with pain than you can without pain. We do not like it. There is something about pain. Pain protects us from sin. Psalm 119:67: *Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.* A child puts his hand on the stove and finds out from experience and through pain that it burns. They learn something out of the pain. You do not put your hand on the stove. God has established that sin always brings pain. Immediately, the pain of guilt comes to the heart or brings conviction. Adam and Eve had pain. God established sin and pain to go together. Psalm 119:67: *Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.* Psalm 119:71: *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.* Psalm 119:75: *I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.* God is faithful. Why? He loves us and teaches us that sin and suffering are siamese twins. Now, that is not of sin, but it does tell us that something is wrong.

Notice the example of suffering. Turn to James 5. Here, he calls attention to the example of suffering. When I think of the example of suffering of this man, I can think of nobody else in human history, outside of the Lord Jesus Christ, that has suffered like this individual has suffered. I will read about it in just a moment. James 5:10-11: *Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.* Now who is he writing to? He is writing to people who are hurting. James 1:1: *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.* The children of Israel scattered. They left their jobs. They left their homes. They left their relatives. They went out all over the empire and were strangers and aliens. They were suffering. Now, people in Miami are suffering. They lost everything. These folks lost everything and were scattered everywhere. James writes to them.

Let us talk about Job. Forty-two chapters are given in the book of Job that are the subject of: Why do the righteous suffer? Forty-two chapters – can you find any other subject that God has forty-two chapters about? A whole lot of chapters are forgotten. Joseph was an illustration of suffering. God gave a whole book to this idea of suffering. Job had economic loss. He lost seven sons and three daughters. Then, the suffering became so intense that it blotted out their death. He was not thinking about their death. He was thinking about the agony that he was in. It was something so terrible that it blotted out the agony of the loss of his entire family. It was agony indeed. Let us look at it. Don Baker has a book entitled, *Pains Hidden Purpose*. I want to read to you a couple of pages. Don Baker went through the book of Job and pulled out phrases that described suffering. Notice Job's economic loss. He lost everything. He lost his family. Then, he says, "A new pain began with an itch. As Job awoke from restless sleep, he soon became aware that his body was inflamed with a sore and angry swelling. The red spots that covered his flesh were hot and tender to the touch. They spread quickly over his entire body until he was covered with one universal boil that stretched from his head to his feet. His bones ached. His legs began to thicken. His hair fell out. His face swelled. His voice became hoarse." Now, Don Baker was not imagining. He was pulling from Job these incidents. "His entire appearance changed until his face became grim and distorted. His skin was encrusted and constantly running with pus. To simply state that Job was smitten with sore boils from the head to the foot does not begin to explain the extent of his sufferings. To add the words, 'he scraped himself with a piece of broken pottery' suggests more, but still not enough. To state, 'that due to the chronic and contagious nature of his disease and the hideousness of his appearance, he was banished to the local garbage dump to sit in the ashes,' this suggests the ultimate isolation which still fails to say it all. Job describes the enormity of his immense suffering by stating that he could not sleep. He continually tossed until dawn. He used dirt clods to cover his running sores. Worms crawled in his flesh. The thought of food made him sick. His pain was so intense that he was forced to bite his own flesh to tear out the

boils. His flesh rotted before his very eyes. The itching never ceased. He was flushed and red from weeping. His eyes were dark and recessed from lack of sleep. His body was shriveled and wrinkled. Job was exhausted and alone. His breath was foul. He could hardly breathe. His soul was bathed in bitterness. He was emaciated to the point that his bones clung to his skin. His flesh turned black. He was constantly burning with fever, and the pain never ceased.” By the way, Don Baker has a reference to where the verses of Scripture that these statements refer to are found. “The only place he could find rest was in the ashes and dung and garbage outside the city among the beggars, the outcasts, the lepers, and the dogs. He was deserted by his friends and mocked by his enemies. He described himself as a rag doll grabbed by the neck and shaken to pieces. He was as a target set up and shot through with arrows. His condition was so desperate; his appearance was so contemptible; his pain was so continual; his shame was so complete that his wife finally suggested that he kill himself. Many speculated as to just what Job’s wife may have meant when she looked at that emaciated and blackened body and suggested that he end his suffering. Some see Job’s wife, at this point, as hardened and bitter and unconcerned for his relationship with God. I see her as a sensitive, caring, concerned woman who loved Job and honored her commitment. No family could have enjoyed the oneness Job’s family shared if their mother had been calloused or cruel. But, she was stretched. Weeks of suffering had passed *without relief. Each morning, she would wake up to the same pain, only to find that it had intensified. Each night, she would pray for her husband’s healing, but it never came. There was no medication – no Tylenol #3, no Percocet, no Demerol, no Morphine to ease the pain, no Valium, not even aspirin to help him sleep. He looked so hideous, and his condition was so infectious that he was forced to move out. She could stand it no longer. And in a moment of deep and frustrated anger, she suggested, ‘Job, why don’t you curse God and die? Tell God you have had enough. He is not able to heal you. He has gone back on His promise. He is not even aware of your problem. I would rather see you dead than like this. Maybe we could die together.’ Besides the physical pain, the emotional and spiritual anguish was immense. He was a man with a broken body and a broken spirit. Occasionally, he had flash backs to the good old days, the years gone by. He recalled the days when God took care of him, when God’s friendship was felt in his home, when all of his children were around him, when his life prospered, when the elders honored him and the young men stepped aside and revered him. Why, even the highest officials in the city stood in respect for him, but that was long ago. That was gone. In place of honor and prosperity, now the young men made fun of him. He was a joke to them. They spit in his face. They would lay traps in his path. They would come at him from all directions. He lived in terror with no one to help. Depression haunted his days. He would cry to God but got no answer. His voice of joy and gladness had turned to mourning. His state was so horrible that even his wife finally deserted him. Slowly, methodically, he was being stripped to the very nakedness of his spiritual being. All the things that clothe the spirit of man were being ripped from him, and all that man leans upon for help and strength was taken from him until all that was left was a soul that was forced to stand naked and alone in the universe of God.*” That is affliction. I read that, and I marvel how in the world could a man survive. Forty-two chapters were given to the subject of Job. Job was looking for answers, and God never answered it. Job asked, “Why? Why? Why?” God never told him why. But, God gave him such a revelation of His power and control and sovereignty in creation that Job was humbled. He saw God. He stopped asking questions, and he started worshipping.

Consider the character of the Lord. Does God really care? Now, let us just lay our hearts out here. Does God really care about me? If the sun is shining at your house and if everyone is healthy and wealthy and if everything is going good, “Oh, yes sir, God cares for me.” But just suppose you lived in Miami today. Thoughts would come into your heart and mind, “Does God care? Does God know? Can He do anything about this? Does God care?” When you come to a position like that, you are either driven to God or driven to atheism. God allows suffering. This began when God seemingly set up Job before the devil. The devil said, “You built a hedge about

him. No wonder — anybody would serve You. You let me get in the front yard, and I will make him curse You to Your face.” The furnace of affliction was designed by Satan to make Job blaspheme God, to discredit God, to discredit the character of God, and to shatter the faith of this man that God commended. God allows suffering. He allows it. I do not understand it. He allows suffering like we read about awhile ago. I have never known anybody to suffer like Job, and I have been to a lot of hospitals and sat beside a lot of beds. I have never met anybody — I do not know anybody — that has ever experienced what Job did. God put that there for you and me. He said, “Consider.” God allows suffering. God is concerned for human sufferings. He tells about the body in 1 Corinthians 12. Every member of the body suffers with it. When there is something wrong with the body, the head is aware of it, and the alarm goes off. It may be an ingrown toenail, but that toenail tells me, “I am tired of the body. I am hurting.” Jesus is the head of the body, and there is no suffering, no heartache, and no pain that does not first echo in the heart of God. Does He care? Turn to Isaiah 63:9. Is He affected by our suffering? Isaiah 63:9: *In all their affliction he was afflicted . . .* Watch now. Is Peggy here this morning? I held Peggy when they put her to sleep. I held her in my arms while they gave her ether for surgery. I stood at her bedside, and my heart was moved when she was spread-eagled out — just a little thing, a few months old. I could not touch her. I could not lay hold of her. I could not visit her except for a few hours in the nine or ten days she was in the hospital. I hurt. My heart went out to her. But listen, I did not, I could not, enter into her suffering. God is not a God to just touch and move out of sight from suffering. God entered into my suffering and your suffering. How did He do that? No parent can enter into the suffering of somebody else. I can never enter into somebody else’s suffering. I can sympathize, and my heart can be moved, but for me to suffer, I have to have the pain that they have. Then, I will have entered into it. So in this world, does God care? 2 Samuel 7:6 talks about God: . . . *I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.* God said, “Every weary journey of forty years, I walked step by step through the wilderness. I walked.” You read in Hosea 11:8: *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?* You hear the heart of God toward adulterous Israel. He chose Hosea as an instrument of suffering to show to the world His offer to Israel. God hurts. He said, “Oh, what did you find in me? Did you find me a wilderness?” You hear the cry of God that aches for His people. Reality — can He be hurt? I have an article here that happened in Germany. At the age of fifteen, an imprisoned Jewish boy named Elie Wiesel, endured unspeakable horrors at the Auschwitz concentration camp. One lives forever in his memory, not as of mass murder or torture but of punishment applied to a single child. “The victim, maybe twelve years old, had been caught helping a Dutchman horde arms inside the camp. He was sentenced to death. The boy had a refined, beautiful face so different from the gaunt, disfigured face of most of the prisoners.” Wiesel said, “To execute a child publicly before thousands of prisoners was no easy thing, even for the SS. The camp stoolies refused to assist this time, so the SS had to perform the death themselves. They erected three gallows — one for the child and two more for other condemned prisoners. The three victims mounted the gallows and sat in chairs as the SS placed their necks in the nooses. ‘Long live liberty,’ cried the two adults. The child said nothing, but from the rows of angry spectators a cry came up, ‘Where is God? Where is He?’ *The chairs were tipped over and the bodies jerked and dangled limply from the ropes. Guards ordered all the prisoners to march past the three victims. It was a terrible sight. The two adults were dead with their tongues hanging out, already swollen and blue tinged, but the third rope was still twitching slightly. The child, being so light, was still alive, and it took the boy perhaps one-half hour to die. The prisoners had to file past looking him full in the face as his life fluttered away. Behind me,*” says Wiesel, “I heard the same man asking, ‘Where is God now?’ And I heard a voice within me answer him, ‘Where is He? He is here, hanging here on the gallows.’” That night the question of, “Where is God?” haunted Wiesel and thousands of other survivors who cried out in their human hells and heard no answer. Wiesel intended his conclusion to be understood in its most literal atheistic meaning. God’s silence proved He was on the gallows dead – helpless, unresponsive, and undependable. Others would use his same words but with a different meaning.

God had suffered alongside the young child as He grieves and suffers with every pain of His children on earth. But, if He were there hanging on the gallows watching the thousands, no millions, of innocents march to the ovens, why did He not intervene? And, why did they not sense God's presence? Never had He seemed more distant. At this point, the doctrine of the Trinity becomes so mystifying that other religions shrink away. Did Almighty God simply allow His Son to suffer for us, or did He suffer in Christ on our behalf? If Jesus Christ is not God, He is not Savior. It would not be right if Jesus was a high angel and if God put all the sins of the world upon an angel. God would not suffer any pain. But, in the crucifixion, Jesus Christ was Jehovah of the Old Testament, and He was God who went to the cross. If He is not God, we are all lost. On one of the talk shows, Phil Donahue said the reason he became disillusioned with Christianity was that, "How could an all-knowing, all-loving God allow His Son to be murdered on the cross in order to redeem my sins? If God the Father is so all-loving why did He come down and go to Calvary?" The answer, of course, is that in some incomprehensible way, it was God Himself who came to earth and died. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. Now I cannot explain it, but the Bible talks about the blood. Acts 20 talks about the blood of God. "Well, God does not have any blood." Yes sir, but Jesus Christ was a human being. He was a God-man. He was as much God as God the Father. He was man. He was God. He was a God-man. When Jesus Christ left Heaven, He came to this earth to suffer. Isaac talks about His suffering. Nobody has suffered as Jesus did. Job had not suffered as Jesus did. Why did He suffer? He suffered because we have sinned. Every pain, every heartache, every sorrow that has ever been afflicted upon man — Jesus felt the full blow. Does He care? You go to Calvary with Him. He surely entered into our sufferings. Isaiah 53:3: *He is despised and rejected of men . . . He was born in poverty. People talk about poverty. Most of them cannot comprehend. Jesus Christ was poverty stricken. 2 Corinthians 8:9: For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. He who was rich, yet for your sakes became poor.* Isaiah 53:3-5: *He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.* Oh, look at Calvary. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. It talks about Jesus Christ, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Calvary was something that was always in the heart of God; and for thousands of years, God bore, moment by moment, day by day, the impending agony of becoming sin for us. God was in Christ. He suffered. He suffered. You will never suffer like that. John 3:16: *For God so loved the world, that he gave . . .* The pictorial Chinese language combines the two concepts of love and pain in John 3:16 in eloquent symbolism. The character that expresses the highest kind of love, semblance for love and for pain, are brushed on top of each other to form a word like pain-love. Thus, a mother pain-loves her child. She pours out her whole being on the child's behalf. In essence, God showed pain-love to creation by emptying Himself and joining us in the incarnation. Hebrews 2:18: *For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.* He suffered like nobody else has suffered. I do not understand the Trinity, but the Bible teaches it. He sits at the right hand of the Father in a body, and the marks that He has in His hands and in His side are marks that came because of the suffering of Calvary's cross. There will never be any time in eternity that he will ever be allowed to forget that. John saw Him, and the marks are still in His hands that He cares. When I kneel to pray, somebody cares. Somebody understands. Somebody is touched. Somebody is moved with the feelings of my infirmities. He cares! He cares!

Notice God's purpose in suffering. What is His purpose? My, that is a another study. Romans 8:28-29: *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.* Notice

what sin has done to man – the vileness. God has predestined, determined, that He is going to make you and me like Jesus, conformed to His image. That is not talking about when you get to Heaven. God started that work of conforming us to His image when you got saved. The pathway to being conformed to the image of Christ is suffering. God is more concerned in our character than He is in our comfort. He promises His grace is sufficient. He does not tell us why in many instances; but He says His grace is sufficient. Fire purifies. Job knew he was in the fire. He said in Job 23:10: *But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.* God is looking for gold. Gold comes out of suffering. When you throw the ore in the fire and everything is melted, the ore is separated from the gold. God puts us in the fire, in the furnace. God wants gold. He destroys everything else. Give me gold! Gold – in Heaven, the streets are paved with gold as a reminder that we came there by intense suffering. . . . *when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.* Fire purifies. Suffering is temporal. A woman suffers in child birth. When it is all over and she is holding the little one, she does not remember it any more. If she did, she would not get pregnant again. I have suffered. I do not remember it. It is temporal. Suffering is temporal; rewards are eternal. Romans 8:18: *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* That is what He has to say. Suffering unites the body. If there is no pain, the body cannot rush to the aid because there is no pain in the body. We are isolated in one form or another. Pain unites the body. Pain united the body. Christians have rushed to Miami and rushed to Miami and rushed to Miami. People that were hurting are working and giving and praying. Why? Pain unites the body of Christ and drives them to each other. Do you want a really sweet fellowshiping church? Then, you will have tragedy; you will have heartaches; and you will have broken hearts. What does it do? It drives believers to each other. Pain brings us together. Notice something else about pain. Suffering is to make us better not bitter. When I get angry, who am I angry at? Basically, I am angry at God. "He does not care. Why? Why?" There are a lot of bitter Christians. They did not learn from suffering. Why did they not learn from suffering? Because they did not get a hold of the fact that suffering has a purpose. God has a purpose. It is to conform us like His Son. Suffering provides a witness to the lost. Paul and Silas were in jail. Their backs were beaten. Their feet were put in irons, and they were thrust into the inner stocks. At midnight, two battered believers began to sing. "God joined in," somebody said, "and sang bass and shook the foundation of the whole business." What happened? They went in with their stripes on their back, but they came out with the jailer and his family under their arms. God allows us to suffer. By the way, sheep suffer quietly. Goats make a whole lot of noise. I remember a man – I believe I led him to Christ – that got saved in one of my meetings. He lived over in Haynes City. He was suffering, dying of cancer. Across the hall, there was a man who did not seem to have much wrong with him. He was cussing really loud and griping about everything. This quiet fellow dying said, "I wish he would not do that." What was he doing? He was dying quietly like a sheep – silently. . . . *led as a sheep to the slaughter* . . . They do not break. Goats make a whole lot of noise. God lifts us up in our suffering as a witness to lost people that are around us. James 5:11: *Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.* The word *pitiful* simply means the utmost tender compassion. Look at the end of Job. Read the last chapter. Suffering is governed by a tender, compassionate refiner. See him sitting at the refiners furnace. He is sitting. He controls the temperature. He controls the heat. He controls the intensity. He knows the fire. He knows the human heart and how much it can stand. It is like an anesthetic given to you while being operated on to guard and to watch the heart. Watch the heart. Watch the heart during surgery. The Lord Jesus watches our heart. 1 Corinthians 10:13: *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* He sits with you by the fire. He governs the length. He governs the heat. He governs the whole business. He cares. He is a personal God. What does God want out of us? Turn to 1 Peter 1:7. God wants gold. *That the trial of your faith, being much*

more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: He wants to make us like Jesus; but the thing that God wants out of you and me above anything else is that He wants us to trust Him. That is where the battle, the trial of your faith, is. Trusting will bring glory and honor and praise. The trial of your faith — He wants us to trust Him where we cannot trace Him. He wants us to trust Him when we do not understand why. He wants us to trust Him. Look at James 1:12. There is a crown for those who come out of the furnace still loving the Lord. James 1:12: *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.* The fire was hot. “Do you still love Me? Do you still trust Me?” That is the furnace of affliction. God wants our trust not out comprehension. If we trust Him, then our love will not waver. If we distrust Him, then what happens? Our love has wings. Spurgeon has given a paragraph about a matter of suffering and benefits. Listen carefully to this: “When we are in trouble, let me give you a word of caution. Do not expect to perceive any immediate benefit resulting from it. I have tried myself, when under sharp pain, to see whether I have grown a bit more resigned or more earnest in prayer or more rapped in fellowship with God. I confess I have never been able to see the slightest trace of improvement at such times. For pain distracts and scatters the thoughts.” Remember that word: . . . *nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness* . . . The gardener takes his knife and prunes the fruit trees to make them bring forth more fruit. His little child comes trudging at his heels and says, “Father, I do not see that the fruit comes on the trees after you cut them.” “No, dear child, it is not likely you would; but come around in a few months when the season of fruit is come, then you shall see the golden apples which thank the knife.” Graces which are meant to endure require time for their production. Daniel and the three Hebrew children went in the fire. They did not go in there alone. There was a fourth Person in that fire. Isaiah 43:2-3: . . . *when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour* . . . God promises to be with us. He promises the fire will not hurt. He promises afterwards the peaceable fruits of righteousness. He promises afterwards that the glory will far outweigh this affliction and suffering. If you are here today, and you are lost, affliction ought to drive you to God. In your affliction, you cannot see a God of purpose in your life. You just see blind chance happening unto you. God uses affliction to drive a person to God and to destroy all confidence in themselves that they might get saved.