

A Place Called Wits' End

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"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.

"They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end" (Psalm 107:23-27).

In this psalm, the place called "wit's end" is on a ship's deck in a storm-tossed sea. Giant waves carry the ship up to the heavens, then drop it down to the depths. Powerful winds toss it back and forth so that none of the sailors can find their "sea legs." They stagger across the deck like drunken men.

The ship's sails are tattered and ripped, and wave after powerful wave crashes onto the deck. The sailors have to struggle just to hold on. It looks like it's all over for them, and they're in total despair. They are helpless - vulnerable to the power of the elements, unable to stop the storm, powerless to save themselves.

These sailors have come to a place called "wit's end." It is a condition that afflicts all Christians at one time or another. This phrase means simply, "having lost or exhausted any possibility of perceiving or thinking of a way out." In short, it is the end of all human ability and resources. There is no escape - no help, no deliverance, other than in God Himself!

Perhaps You Have Already Arrived at "Wit's End"!

Like the sailors aboard the ship, you have simply been going about your business, moving on in your walk with Jesus. Then one day, out of nowhere, a storm hit - and waves of trouble came crashing down on you from all sides!

Life's troubles seldom come one at a time. They're like the waves in a storm - coming one after another, fast and furious, mounting higher and higher. It's as if the sun has gone down, the air has turned cold and icy, and the winds of trouble have begun beating down. Like the sailors in Psalm 107, your "...soul is melted because of trouble..." (verse 26). (The Hebrew word for melted here means "fainting with fear.")

I must note: God Himself has initiated this storm! "...For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind..." (verse 25). He's the One who brought the sailors to this place. He's the One raising the wind, stirring up the waves, tossing the ship. It is all His doing!

Yet this can be a great encouragement to our faith whenever troubles hit us from all sides. We have the knowledge that all troubles and storms in life have been ordained by God, for those who walk in righteousness. They aren't caused by the devil or some particular sin. Rather, the Lord has brought us to wit's end - and He has a purpose in it all!

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12).

God is not surprised by your ordeal. In fact, it is happening because He wants to produce something in your heart - to reveal His glory in you.

Yet you may feel it is absolutely the worst storm in your life! Your trial may be a financial struggle, business troubles, slander, family problems or a personal tragedy. You go to bed at night with a restlessness inside, a cloud hanging over you. When you awaken, the dull ache is still with you. And it keeps hanging on until one day you wake up crying, "God, how much more do I have to endure? How long will You allow me to go through this? When will it all end?"

When did the storm stop for the sailors in Psalm 107? When did God bring them into their desired safe haven? According to the psalmist, two things happened:

- First, the sailors came to their wits' end, giving up on all human hope or help. They said, "There's no way we can save ourselves. Nobody on earth can get us out of this!"
- Second, they cried to the Lord in the midst of their trouble - turning to Him alone for help!

"Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven" (Psalm 107:28-31).

If you are a true child of God - if you're set on allowing Him to mold you into the image of His Son - then your battle won't stop until you give up trying to figure it all out and throw yourself completely into God's care. Until He has accomplished His eternal purposes in you, your troubles will only continue to rage!

Right now, you could be keeping your storm raging, your troubles piling up. You could be missing the calm that God wants to bring to you. How does this happen?

It happens when you keep questioning the Lord in the midst of your crisis; when you keep murmuring and complaining; when you phone a friend whom you think has the answer for you; when you turn to counselors, psychologists, lawyers, experts; when you go to a Christian bookstore and buy stacks of self-help books and tapes; when you keep looking for that one secret, that one plan, to deliver you from your trouble.

Beloved, you're only prolonging your trial! It sounds simple, but from the very beginning, God has been wanting our childlike trust and confidence. And you're only keeping the storm raging and the waves piling up when you refuse to cry out, "Lord, I'm in a mess - and the only way out is You!"

God Keeps Bringing Us to Wit's End Until We Learn To Trust Him Completely - No Matter How Hopeless Things Appear!

We see this happen time after time with the children of Israel in the wilderness. Again and again God brought them to wit's end - to test them, to see if they would trust Him. But each time they refused!

First the Lord brought them to a place called Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. He had shut them in - the sea in front, the mountains on both sides, and Pharaoh behind. God had actually led them to a place of human hopelessness - to wit's end!

Had the Israelites simply believed one promise God had made to them, they could have been free from all worry and fear. God had told them:

"...the Lord thy God bare [carried] thee...the Lord your God...went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in...to shew you by what way ye should go..." (Deuteronomy 1:31-33).

God was saying, in other words, "I will go with you! I will carry you as a man carries his son. I will walk before you and find places for you to pitch your tents. Wherever the cloud I have provided for you stops, that's where you are to stop."

It happened that the cloud stopped between Migdol and the sea - a place of total befuddlement, of wit's end! There was no way Israel could figure their way through the Red Sea. And now Pharaoh's army was fast approaching.

Are you in a hard place right now, with a storm brewing? I ask you: How did you get there? Do you think the devil put you there? My answer to you is this: "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord..." (Psalm 37:23). No matter what storm you're going through, no matter how black things seem, God has put you in that place - at wit's end!

Please understand: God is never caught by surprise. He doesn't have to ad lib His divine direction whenever troubles befall us. He doesn't flip some cosmic coin to determine His actions on our behalf. No - long before Israel left Egypt and arrived at Migdol, God's plan for them was already set. He had already commanded the winds to blow at a certain hour, to wall up the Red Sea. He had known all along exactly what He was going to do!

Likewise today, God has a plan to bring you out of your storm. In fact, He devised that plan long before your trouble

even started. Yet He will hold it back to the very last moment, waiting for you to trust Him. He wants to see if you'll put your life into His hands and say, "Live or die, I will trust the Lord!"

Israel failed this test. They became fearful, fainting at wit's end. Yet God still did for them what He had planned all along. He delivered Israel with a mighty miracle. But the result was, the people sang their song of faith on the wrong side of the Red Sea. Had they simply believed God's promise - "I will go before you and carry you as a man carries his son" - they would have passed the test!

If you panic at wit's end as Israel did - fainting, accusing God of not caring - He nevertheless will move in at the last moment and deliver you. But, afterward, He will take you into another wit's-end experience - because you did not come through the last one trusting in Him!

Indeed, just three days after their Red Sea deliverance, Israel was back in the middle of another big crisis. The people were hot, exhausted, overcome by thirst. Their scouts now came back crying, "There is water ahead at Marah, but we can't drink it. It's too bitter!"

Scripture makes it very clear: It wasn't the devil who had led Israel to this testing place. It was the cloud that had led them here. Once more, the people were at wit's end. And what a wailing went up from the camp - what awful accusations against Moses and God: "You've brought us here to die!"

Did God know these waters at Marah were bitter? Of course He did! But He had a plan. There was a certain living tree near that bitter pond, and He would use it to purify the waters for Israel.

I wonder - how many years before had God planted that tree in that spot? And how many times had the hot sun beaten on that tree to wither it? How many worms had tried to kill it? How many passersby had tried to cut it down? I tell you, nobody could have touched it - because God had a plan for it! He said, "One day My children are going to come here, and these waters will need to be purified. I have a plan to deliver them - and it's going to involve this tree!"

Of course, this tree in the desert represents the Cross. And, beloved, God has already planted a tree of deliverance for you! He knows exactly what to do about your problem, and the exact hour He will do it. All He wants from you is a quiet trust. He wants you to say, "My God is with me. He knows the way out of my trouble!"

Wit's End Is a Place of Suffering, Pain and Insecurity!

We see this illustrated in Israel's experience at Rephidim:

"And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin...according to the commandment of the Lord, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink...."

"And...the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me" (Exodus 17:1-4).

God had led Israel to the driest place in the whole wilderness. It was a testing place - with no stream, no well, not even a trickle of water. Most baffling of all, Israel was led there "...according to the commandment of the Lord..." (verse 1).

God Himself had allowed His people to grow thirsty: "And the people thirsted there for water..." (verse 3). Babies were crying, children wailing, grandparents suffering parched throats. Parents looked at their families and thought, "In a few days we'll all be dead." So they turned in anger to Moses, crying, "Give us water to drink!" They were still depending on man - on the flesh!

I want to stop here to point something out. First, God took Israel to Migdol by the sea, to test them - and they failed to trust Him there. Next, He took them to Marah, where He had another plan of deliverance - and they failed the test again. Now He brought them to Rephidim for more testing.

Do you see the pattern? If you don't learn to trust the Lord in simple, childlike faith when you're being tested, He will bring you back to yet another testing ground. You'll go from one test to another!

Israel was in just such a place once again. They were hot, thirsty, angry. But God already had a plan! He wasn't going to let them die. He had chosen beforehand to have them walk up Mount Horeb to a reservoir of water that He had prepared long before. And that source would last not just a day, a week or a month - but thirty-eight years!

Yet God was waiting for a response of faith from Israel. He was saying, "I have taken you through all of these things, but you've refused to learn. Will you trust Me now? How many more problems do I have to allow in your life before you'll trust Me?"

Many Christians are being tested and tried right now through unemployment. They have sent out resumes in every direction, but weeks roll by and nothing turns up. They've used up all their savings, and now they're surrounded by creditors. Their situation looks totally hopeless. There is pain and suffering involved; it is never easy.

Others have jobs but are underemployed. They don't earn enough to make ends meet. Many working young people have had to move back in with their parents. And thousands of single mothers are scraping by on a tiny income.

Numerous business owners are barely surviving. Many have trouble sleeping at night because the business world is so crazy, with skyrocketing taxes, increasing regulations, shaky profits. The competition is growing, and they have exhausted all their ideas and alternatives. Now they lie awake worrying about what to do.

These suffering, anxiety-ridden people come to church and raise their hands in praises to the Lord. They put on big smiles and hug each other. Yet they are going through awful pain and insecurity. They are troubled - completely at wit's end!

I ask you: As God's children, do we have no option but fear - sleepless nights, endless days of questioning God, living in utter turmoil? Consider Israel: Was their fretting and grumbling the only response possible? Was it simply human for them to react as they did, out of concern for their families?

Let me answer these by asking another question: Hasn't God always known what He was going to do in each of these cases? Hasn't He always had a plan?

Think about it: Didn't God already plan to have the winds open the Red Sea? Didn't He already preserve a tree at Marah that would heal the waters? Didn't He already choose a rock on Mount Horeb, out of which He would supply Israel's water for decades?

Our loving, heavenly Father would never lead His children into a dry desert only to let them die of thirst - especially when He has a reservoir stored in a nearby rock! God has always had a plan for His people. And He has a plan for you right now, to deliver you from your present trouble.

There is no problem you have that He can't unravel!

Let me show you why God had to bring Israel to the brink of disaster before He miraculously met their need: **God Brought Israel to Wit's End to Try to Induce Faith Through the Miraculous - And It Didn't Work!**

I want to talk to you about the limitations of the miraculous. Many Christians travel thousands of miles each year to witness supernatural works - miracles, manifestations, signs, wonders. Yet, ironically, these sign-seeking addicts never develop a lasting faith - because miracles rarely produce that. Instead, they always need a bigger, more spectacular miracle.

Nobody had ever seen as many supernatural works as Israel. God provided miracle after miracle for them - and yet each work left the people as faithless and unbelieving as at the first! You'd think that the ten plagues on Egypt would have produced faith in the Israelites. When Egypt was afflicted with flies, there were none to be found in Israel's camp. When Egypt fell under total darkness, there was no darkness in Israel. Yet none of these miraculous plagues produced faith of any kind!

Even after God opened the Red Sea, Israel's faith lasted only three days. Scripture says:

"...they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea" (Psalm 106:7).

The psalmist is saying here: "They even doubted God at the Red Sea - the place where He performed His greatest miracle!"

The elders who watched Moses strike the rock at Marah saw water come flowing out. Indeed, all of Israel drank to the full - and yet that miracle didn't produce any faith! Then God sent hordes of quail to Israel. Hundreds of thousands of birds fell from the sky into the midst of their camp, and the people cooked them for meat. Yet still they had no faith! The next morning, when Israel came out of their tents, the ground was covered with manna, miraculously sent from heaven. Yet even this didn't produce faith!

On the contrary, after all these glorious miracles, God's children wrung their hands in despair, crying, "...Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Exodus 17:7). In other words: "Is God even with us? How could He be leading us when we have so much trouble?"

Israel had received forty years of miracle food, miracle water, a miracle cloud by day, miracle fire by night, miracle protection, miracle clothes that never wore out. Moses told them:

"...These forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing" (Deuteronomy 2:7).

And yet still they doubted Him. In fact, all but two of those who had witnessed these miracles died in the wilderness - in total unbelief!

We are so like Israel. We want God to speak a word, grant us a miraculous deliverance, quickly meet our needs, remove all our pain and suffering. In fact, you may be saying right now, "If God would just get me out of this mess - if He'd give me this one miracle - I'd never doubt Him again!" Yet, what about all the miracles He has performed for you already? They haven't produced in you any faith to help you in your present trouble!

Recently, two precious men of God from the Zulu tribe in Africa visited Times Square Church. An incredible revival is taking place among the 8 million Zulus today, and God is doing miraculous things among them. For example, more than ten cases have been documented of the dead being raised.

Yet that is not what these men wanted to talk about. Rather, what has impressed them most about the revival are the "overcomer Zulus" - those who take a stand for Christ, burning witchcraft books and witnessing boldly even though they're being tested and tried severely. These people were once evil, with murderous spirits - and now they're being transformed into the image of Jesus!

I believe the greatest sign or wonder to the world in these last days isn't a person who's been raised from the dead. No, what truly makes an impact on the mind and spirit of the ungodly is the Christian who endures all trials, storms, pain and suffering with a confident faith. Such a believer emerges from his troubles stronger in character, stronger in faith, stronger in Christ.

I recently read of a foggy little town of 4,000 people in Hungary with an alarming suicide rate. The newspaper headline read: "Suicide Stalks Isolated Village." Residents there have committed suicide in every conceivable manner. One man tossed himself into an abandoned well. Another hanged himself. Some people have overdosed. Others cut their wrists, swallowed pesticides, jumped in front of trains. Entire families have taken their lives, from teenagers to grandparents.

The town is Asotthalom, one hundred miles south of Budapest, and it is a desolate, lonely place. A doctor named Ulloh runs a psychiatric clinic there, and he told a reporter, "Some people call the road here the 'narrow road to the cursed place.' ...It is ingrained in the people that God doesn't very much like us."

Beloved, that is the destructive power of unbelief! There is no worse despair than to believe God has it in for you. This was Israel's problem, and too often it is ours as well. We have an unspoken sense that all our suffering and troubles are the result of God's displeasure with us!

When You Are at Wit's End, One of Two Things Will Happen to You.

Every Christian emerges from wit's end either trusting in man, or trusting fully in God - that is, either cursed or blessed. Which way will you respond in your time of trouble?

Jeremiah writes:

"Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit" (Jeremiah 17:5-8).

The first person Jeremiah talks about here doesn't wait for God to move. He takes matters into his own hands - making his own plans, turning to people he thinks have clout, taking shortcuts. He is always scheming, planning, manipulating. His philosophy is, "It's not what you know that counts, it's who you know." And he's forever looking for that special "who" to solve his problems!

Scripture says a spiritual dryness sets into this person's life:

"...he shall be like the heath, [shrub] in the desert..." (verse 6).

He looks barely alive - with no fruit, no wellspring of life. He's always on the brink of dying!

"...he...shall not see when good cometh..." (same verse).

He never partakes in the joy of being delivered by God's hand. And everything he thinks looks good turns into misery. He is isolated, existing only in "...parched places..." (same verse). He keeps withering away - sweating it out, always frantic.

But consider the one who trusts God in the hard places, at wit's end:

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord" (verse 7).

This Christian is "planted." He has roots, stability, a reservoir of Living Water. He is always "spreading out," fruitful and green with fresh life. Scripture says

"...he...shall not be careful [fearful] in the year of drought..." (verse 8).

When things get hot and bothersome, he won't be afraid!

This person says, "Jesus, I give up looking to any person to bring me out of my trial. I turn to You alone! You're my only keeper, my only hope. I look to You to bring me out of this!" The Lord desires this kind of faith from us in everyday matters. You may object, "But, Brother Dave, I'm still unemployed, still having trouble." Yet I have to believe God's Word: "Trust Me, and you'll be blessed!"

You may answer, "But I don't know what I'm going to do. The storm is still raging. It looks so hopeless. I don't see any sign of help or deliverance!" To all these things God still says, "Trust Me, My child - and you'll be blessed!"

It doesn't matter whether your trial is with your family, with your business, or with putting food on the table. If you put your total trust in His Word and His faithfulness, God has promised to bless you - and He cannot lie! When the heat comes, you won't even be bothered. When the wind comes, you'll stand strong - because you will have learned to trust Him in spite of all unnerving circumstances. You'll be a green tree bearing the abundant fruit of confidence - and everyone around you will be given hope and encouragement as they behold your quiet trust.

God, help us all to surrender our wills, our personal agendas, when we come to this place called wit's end. May it become a place of renewed faith and trust in our loving Father. Amen!

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