

Pain, Suffering, and Confusion



David Wilkerson May 1, 1981

In recent months I have had a sinking feeling inside me, a feeling that our entire society is spinning out of control. There is an eerie kind of confusion spreading throughout the land.

There is a gnawing inside that no one (not our President, not our congress, not our courts) can change what is happening. In spite of the optimism of the President, we all seem to know he can't do a single thing to stop inflation, unemployment or crime.

The divorce rate seems to be spinning out of control. Now even some of our best-known ministers are getting divorced. It's becoming a national plague! It seems no one is immune. It destroys the feeling of security, because it looks like our society is unraveling and falling apart.

Our kids are going crazy! Ten million of them are victims of broken homes. They are mad and bitter and feel rejected, so they go crazy on parties, sex, drugs, and alcohol. There have been times lately that I thought it was totally hopeless - that we have already lost our young people. 82% now drink; 52% are on drugs, pot; promiscuous sex is everywhere. The only hope is that God is bigger than their problems.

You look at the filth on television, the immorality of our nations, and you wonder to yourself if it is too late! Have we already lost all sense of morality and decency?

The worst part is that the chaos and confusion is now hitting close to home. A great number of very godly people are suffering. Sickness, disease, divorce, depression: it's all now striking God's people. People who had the right confession, who practiced faith, and who loved God dearly can't understand why they and their families are sick. Cancer strikes! Unemployment hits! The bills pile up! Many end up confused, feeling helpless, wondering what hit them. Some blame themselves for a lack of faith, or they live with guilt, supposing that sin is the cause.

I had a rock bottom experience recently. My daughter had a large cancer removed from her bowel. My wife was placed in a psychiatric ward for treatment. All of this happened right after I made a commitment to go back to the streets - immediately after a new commitment to a life of holiness and faith! Everything was going so well. My family was healthy; my wife was at my side; God was revealing new truth to me; and I had a powerful burden for lost souls!

Then the bottom seemed to fall out. I felt helpless! Things were happening beyond my control, and within one week, there was total confusion and chaos in my life. In that confusion, God sent me a message - one that sustained me and showed me what it all meant. Let me share it with you.

It is the message Christ gave His disciples just before He was taken by the priests in the garden.

"Then saith Jesus unto them, all of you shall be offended because of me tonight: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad..." (Matthew 26:31, 32).

In the Original it reads,

"All of you shall be confused because of me, this night..."

Jesus' disciples did not understand a word of this warning! They didn't have the slightest concept of what was about to happen. It was the most important message they would ever receive, and they didn't get it! This very night would be the first of a three-day drama that would be the most important in all of history. A world-changing event was coming! God was about to redeem the world of all sin through His Son Jesus. A fountain of forgiveness and cleansing was about to be opened, soon to flow to all mankind. The disciples and the entire world were on the brink of the most glorious, joyful occasion ever!

Jesus, knowing all of this, did not predict a night of rejoicing, expectation, or praise and glory. Why not? Why could they not spend this night in jubilation on the eve of victory for the church of Jesus Christ? Instead, Jesus predicted a night of chaos and confusion for every disciple. He said, "All of you - every one of you - shall be confused because of me - tonight!"

These Christ-educated, miracle-working men of faith were about to be cast into an hour of chaos! All the faith in the world could not save them from this night of confusion!

They were going to lose their sense of direction! All their guidance system will seem to fail them! They were going to end up feeling lost and running about as if they had no Shepherd!

"I will smite the shepherd..."

What a horrible moment! The night before, they sat under the stars on the Mount of Olives; they sang beautiful hymns. Jesus was there in their midst, revealing to them the truth. They felt the warmth and glow of His very presence. Suddenly, in one night, it seemed to be all over! The enemy moved in and, for a while, seemed to be in control.

Suppose you had been there the night everything spun out of control causing untold confusion. It was a beautiful, calm, star-lit night in the Garden of Gethsemane. The drowsy disciples were comforted by the sound of intercession coming from their Master's lips. (My dad's praying used to comfort me so.)

Visualize Judas, one of their own, leading that mob. They surround the Master; they are screaming, "Imposter! Kill Him! Murder the Man! Away with Him! Child of Satan!"

These disciples watch in horror as the Pharisees and priests drag Him away like a helpless criminal. It is an impossible sight for them to behold! They had seen Jesus whip these same men out of the temple. They heard Jesus boldly call them vipers, hypocrites, and children of the devil! They knew Jesus vanished miraculously once from them at another time. In their hearts they must have been crying, "Call down a host of angels, Master! Escape once more! Don't let these hypocrites drag You about like a thief!"

The disciples were panic stricken! It happened so fast! They weren't programmed for trouble and hard times! They had memorized and practiced all His teachings about miracles, power over devils, and asking and receiving! They had experienced sky-high faith when casting out demons, when the miracles were happening, when multitudes were fed, and when all needs were being supplied by faith.

But their faith had never been tested by a night of chaos and confusion. They conveniently had shut out all His warnings about suffering and pain. They wanted nothing to do with the warnings about the afflictions of the saints - about persecution. They loved it when they were told they had power to speak the word - to bind and loose in Heaven and earth! But they didn't want to hear Him say, "Deny yourself. Lose your life. Sell and give to the poor. In this world you shall have tribulation - trial by faith - trial by fire. Endure hardships."

Peter was the great man of faith in their midst. After all, he was the only one of them who had walked on water!

He was the disciple who didn't believe in suffering or in crosses! Jesus tried to prepare His disciples for a time of suffering and pain, but Peter would have none of that negative thinking.

"Jesus began to show His disciples how he must... suffer many things... and be killed.... Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, God forbid! This shall not happen to you" (Matthew 16:21,22).

Imagine this disciple rebuking Jesus and saying, "You don't have to suffer! Master, claim Your own promises! Let me speak the word of faith and save You from the pain and suffering."

I have heard honest men of God today, with the same misguided faith and zeal as Peter, stand before congregations and rebuke them for their lack of faith. They cry aloud:

"You don't have to suffer! If you do, it is only because you have no faith! Get rid of your negative thoughts and words, and go your way, happy and prosperous, without pain or suffering."

I am convinced that if Christ sat in the audience, hearing this kind of preaching, He would stand up and cry out the same thing He said to Peter: "Stop! Quiet! What you say is offensive to Me. You preach what is of man but not of God!" Peter was an honest man of faith and power, but he didn't know the deeper truths of the Spirit. It was also Peter who said,

"Though all others are confused about You... I shall never be confused" (Matthew 26:33).

Listen to Peter's theology. "Not me, Lord - no pain, no suffering, no confusion for me. My faith will help carry me right through everything. I know my spiritual rights. I believe God. I just don't allow suffering or pain in my life."

But whose faith was the first to crumble under the pressure of confusion that night? Peter's! So it is with so many I know today. They go about boasting about their great faith and how they have conquered all disease and pain. But let cancer strike, let confusion and trouble fall, and they end up in total misery. They get confused by it all! They have no alternative but to blame it on secret sin or a lack of faith.

This night even the Son of God would enter a time of confusion and chaos! Things would get so painful, so confusing, He would end up crying out, "Father, where are you? Why have You forsaken Me?"

Not only did they face a time of confusion, but they were going to be scattered about like abandoned sheep.

"And the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad" (Matthew 26:31).

Look at our Lord's little flock now. Peter was wandering about in the hills, weeping, condemning himself for failing faith. The rest fled to the desert and countryside. They had forgotten the words of Jesus -

"Fear not little flock, for it is my Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

They were on the threshold of a new revelation of inner power and glory, but all they could see were the terrible things happening to them. No miracles now! Everybody is feeling mental pain! They are suffering! They are confused! They can't sense the presence of the Lord! The heavens are brass! They had given up heart! Mary Magdalene came running to them as they were mourning and weeping. She said, "He is alive! He's still our Shepherd!" But they believed her not!

Why would God allow all this confusion, fear, chaos, suffering, and pain? After all, the disciples had not sinned or forsaken the Lord. Their faith at that time was real! They did nothing to deserve all the pain! I feel confident they ended up blaming themselves for what was happening.

"We must have done something wrong! Our faith must have been too weak. We must be paying the price for sin in our lives."

But not so! God permitted every moment, every event! It was all a part of His master plan!

And it was not permitted simply to teach them a lesson. God didn't explain the reasons. He was not trying to educate them about some hidden truth. He was not trying to prove them. He was simply doing His own will. How often we think our suffering and pain is to teach us a lesson. We say, "Well, I hope He shows me what I'm supposed to learn out of all of this quickly, so I can get it over with..." If we end up in the hospital, we think it is God's way of getting us to witness to someone. We try to explain our suffering, hoping to justify God's way of doing things.

There need be no other reason for your confusion, pain, and suffering than God working things out for you in His own way. It is most often the sovereign work of our God unfolding a master plan known only to Himself. Through all suffering of God's people, God is at work! The miracle soon follows the confusion!

Study your Bible, and you will discover these same patterns in the lives of all of God's people. In case after case, when God began to fulfill His promise, the roof seemed to cave in first!

Think of Daniel and the three Hebrew children. They gave themselves to a life of holiness and separation from the world and all its pleasures. Daniel pledged himself to a life of prayer, tears, and intercession. But what did that get Daniel and the three Hebrew children? Confusion just before victory!

You don't go from the prayer closet to some mountaintop victory. You go to the lions' den! You don't go from consecration to a life of ease and blessing only. You go to the fiery furnace! Their theology was not afraid of pain and suffering because they knew it always ended in God having His way! Through lions and red-hot furnaces to God's perfect will!

- Think of Elijah. God gave him a glorious promise of a spiritual awakening in the land, of an outpouring of abundant rain, and of a new day of victory for God's people. Ahab and Jezebel were to be overthrown. But look at all the confusion that broke out after the promise was given. Jezebel threatened his life, chasing him into hiding in the mountains. Wicked forces killed the prophets of God. The land continued in wickedness and drought. The Word of God seemed like a hoax! Can you imagine how confused Elijah must have been? "What kind of answered prayer is this? I'm left to my own! Where is the Lord? Has His promise failed?" And all the while God was brewing up the storm of the century! The confusion would soon pass, and the answer would be forthcoming.
- Christ left His disciples a promise that could have seen them through all the confusion and pain, but they were too swollen up in sorrow to remember. He had told them: "After I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee" (Matthew 26:32).

In other words, "Don't try to figure it all out. Don't question the time of confusion. It's not your fault; it's not your battle. God is at work! When this is all over, I'll still be going before you. Your shepherd will still be there." Do you understand this was between Christ and His Heavenly Father? It was not even the disciples' drama. They were affected by the working of God in someone else's life. My wife developed guilt by thinking she passed cancer to our daughter. She took God's work in Debbie's life as her own. I condemned myself because of my wife's battles. But God showed me that though I, too, may suffer, He is doing something in her. So I quit condemning myself and turned her over to God's keeping. Certainly what God is doing in those near us does bring us confusion and pain. But God wants us to trust Him to be leading through it all. We are not to be overcome with sorrow because of the pain and suffering of others. We must care, pity, and love - but then, we must turn it all over to a loving Father.

No matter what the disciples felt, no matter how confused things appeared to be - God was at all times in control! That is what this revelation of Christ is all about. In your most painful, confusing hour, stop and say: "God had everything under control."

Yes, divorce is out of control. Pornography and lewdity is spreading. The government and world leaders are confused. It looks as if our world is spinning out of control. But that's the clue we've been waiting for! Christ is about to come! We are on the brink of a new world.

Let us not miss the meaning of it all. God is doing His thing. Our Shepherd is still leading! And our suffering and pain will give way to a faith that will never fail. It will be a faith that has been tried, as gold, in the fire of adversity.

Remember, the hardest part of faith is the last half hour, just before the victory comes.

Finally, never be confused by confusion! It does come to the best of God's children at times. But the confusion is often God's way of calling out of us a faith based only on one fact:

God will do what is right for all His children - in His time - in His own way!

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