

## **Tribulation**

Now tonight, I would like to look at something that we all have to deal with, sometimes on a daily basis.

And it's something Jesus has assured us will be unavoidable, and yet we all try to avoid it.

Its tribulation, and Jesus assures us---"**In the world you will have tribulation.**"

Now, that's not too encouraging, is it?

Well, that's because I've taken Jesus' words out of context.

And that's something we should never do, and particularly if we're quoting the Son of God.

What Jesus really said, and you can turn to it in John 16: 33, what Jesus really said was---"**These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the**

**world you will have tribulation; but be  
of good cheer, I have overcome the  
world."**

Now, that's quite different, isn't it?

Yes, we can *expect* tribulation, but we can  
also avail ourselves of Jesus' peace.

We can have peace in this broken world  
because Jesus has "**overcome the world.**"

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But, what about unbelievers, who, like  
ourselves, must deal with these same  
tribulations that we do?

What about them?

Well, they have an answer, too, and it has  
nothing to do with the Lord Jesus.

I'm sure you've heard some of those clichés  
that are supposed to deal with this  
problem:

*We need to keep a stiff upper lip.*

*We simply have to tough it out.*

And then there's the more macho one, *When the going gets tough, the tough get going*, and so on.

Certainly we have to admire the strength and determination of some individuals, but such wisdom usually amounts to pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps--- just trying to make the best of it, and hoping it will soon go away.

There's no possibility of actually enjoying the abiding peace that is found in Jesus. But sometimes I suspect, if my own life is any example, sometimes I suspect we often try to muddle through, relying on the same resources that are available to the world.

Why would we do that?

Perhaps this might be a good time to take another look at tribulation and see what the Bible says about it.

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Certainly there's more than one source of tribulation.

For instance, we can create our own tribulation by unconfessed sin.

Even David, a man after God's own heart, demonstrated that principle.

And then there's the tribulation that Satan puts in our path.

That was well demonstrated by Job's experience, wasn't it?

And by the way, Jesus recommends prayer as a defence against Satan's onslaughts.

In fact, it's included in the Lord's Prayer, and it's found in Luke 11:4, where it says **"---And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one."**

And in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus used this resource to protect Peter.

Luke 22:31-32 "And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

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But there are other causes of tribulation, and that's what I want to speak about tonight.

First of all, we can expect tribulation simply because we live in a fallen world. There are health issues, and even death, as a result of Adam's sin.

There's poverty, and food shortages, that affect great areas of our world, and so on.

I think that's what Jesus was referring to  
in Matthew 6:34 when He said "**Sufficient  
for the day is its own trouble.**"

Here again, we have to be careful not to  
take Jesus' words out of context.

Certainly, He did say---"**Sufficient for the  
day is its own trouble.**"

And that isolated statement might sound a  
lot like that very pessimistic saying---  
"If anything can go wrong, it will go  
wrong."

But that's not all He said.

If we look at Matthew 6:34 in its entirety,  
we will find He said---"**Therefore do not  
worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will  
worry about its own things. Sufficient  
for the day is its own trouble.**"

Yes, He was talking about worrying about the  
future.

You also notice that He began His sentence with a "**Therefore**," which is sort of like saying, *In view of the fact.*

But in view of what facts?

Well, He was pointing to His lesson which begins at V 25 of Chapter 6 and goes right to the end.

We won't take time to read it now, but, basically, He was talking about our need for food and clothing.

And as an example of our Heavenly Father's care, He points to the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field.

And then, in V 34, He wraps it all up by saying---"**Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.**"

Yes, He was talking about *worry*, which is closely associated to tribulation.

In fact, you could say worry pays interest on future tribulation, whether it materializes or not.

And He ends His lesson with the words---

**"Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."**

And by doing so, I think He was emphasizing the fact that our Heavenly Father, in His mercy, has doled out our existence in little packages of 24 hours.

Each one of these packages will contain the daily trials and tribulations common to a fallen race, and God will provide the wherewithal to deal with them.

But He hasn't promised to supply the wherewithal to deal with troubles that have not yet happened, and, in some cases, never will.



It's kind of like the medication some of us have to take for high blood pressure, heart irregularities, etc.

On the bottle, we see the instructions, "Take one pill daily."

In that tablet, there is a measured amount of medication which should meet our needs during the next 24 hours.

But what if we should say, *I'm going to be kind of busy for the next few days. I think I'll take two or three right now and be done with it.*

Not a good idea.

It's called an overdose.

And that's what Jesus is saying about our daily dose of this world's troubles.

God will take you through today, but don't borrow the troubles that are assigned for tomorrow.

Now, certainly, a sensible preparation for future needs is one thing, but worry is quite another.

**"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."**

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But there's something else we can learn about tribulation, and it's illustrated in the lives of Jesus' disciples.

Turn with me then, to Matthew 14:19-33---

**"Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that**

remained. Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children. Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You,

command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

It had been an extremely eventful day, but nothing to compare with their present situation.

You might say they were literally in deep water, and for no fault of their own.

Certainly, if they had been running away from God, as Jonah had been doing, you might expect this tremendous storm.

But they hadn't.

Actually, they were in the middle of this storm because they *had* obeyed Jesus.

Now, is that the way it's supposed to work? Let's check it out.

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First of all, there's no doubt that Jesus had sent them off on this perilous journey.

V 22 says---"**Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side.**"

It wasn't a casual suggestion.

It was a command.

And there was a good reason for His urgency.

We'll talk about that in a few minutes, but the point I want to make here is this.

They had followed *orders*.

Jesus had been very explicit, and they had been very obedient.

In fact, they had probably been obedient against their better judgment.

They had trusted in the Lord with all their hearts and had not leaned on their own understanding.

And isn't that what Proverbs 3:5 encourages us to do?

Now, just to get a better understanding of this whole situation, let me explain something about the Sea of Galilee.

Someone has told me that storms can come up quite suddenly on this particular body of water.

I believe it's got something to do with the wind coming out of the mountains and being channelled along its length.

Now, the disciples would *know* that.

They were experienced fishermen, and their lives depended upon that kind of knowledge.

Nevertheless, they had implicitly followed their Lord's directions, and now they were **"---in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves."**

Of course, someone who didn't really know who Jesus was might mistakenly say---  
*"Well, what would you expect when fishermen take the advice of a carpenter?"*

But we know better, don't we?

And so did the disciples.

They were willing to put their lives in Jesus' hands because He was the Son of God.

But doesn't that very fact lead us to the conclusion that Jesus must have known the storm was coming when He made them get into the boat?

So this whole idea that you can't get into trouble if you obey the Lord doesn't really hold water, does it?

No pun intended.

Actually, the Bible teaches the very opposite.

If you stand up for Jesus, you can expect to add persecution to your regular dose of tribulation.

Certainly Peter made that point very clear, in 1 Peter 4:12-14---"**Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon**



**you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified."**

So, in the long run, persecution for Jesus is a blessing.

But what about that inevitable tribulation that comes our way simply because we're part of a fallen race?

Are they nothing more than a necessary evil, or could they have a positive value?

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Well, to answer that question, let's continue with our examination of Matthew 14:19-33.

Up to this point, we have established the fact that Jesus was very anxious to get His disciples into the boat.

So what was the rush?

Well, John's account sheds more light on that situation.

John 6:15 **"Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone."**

Yes, the people had gotten completely out of hand.

They were so affected by the miracle of the loaves and the fishes that they were prepared to take Him by force.

In fact, they were so determined that the very next day they pursued Him all the way to Capernaum.

So then, it's not surprising that Jesus had found it necessary to act quickly.

Now, I realize because Jesus is the Son of God, there was no way He could have been threatened by the crowd.

Nevertheless, He is also a man, and He usually operated in that context.

So then, first of all, He sent His disciples  
away in a boat, and then He departed into  
a mountain to pray.

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But His disciples' departure had only gotten  
them out of one nasty situation and into  
another.

Matthew 14:24 tells us "---- **the boat was  
now in the middle of the sea, tossed by  
the waves, for the wind was contrary.**"

Yes, "**the wind was contrary.**"

Now, I suppose that could simply mean the  
wind was boisterous, for indeed it was.

But perhaps it meant it was "**contrary**" to  
the direction they wanted to go in.

Or to be more specific, maybe it was

**"contrary"** to Jesus' instructions.

He had told them to go to the "**the other  
side,**" but the wind was going in the

opposite direction, and, of course, so were the waves.

Now, I'm not a sailor, but someone told me that it is a lot safer, and a lot easier, to go with the wind.

And I'm sure the disciples knew that.

Nevertheless, they continued to point their boat toward the other shore.

Why?

Because that's where Jesus told them to go.

You might say common sense pointed in one direction, and Jesus' instructions pointed in the other.

And you know what?

Christians are constantly pressured to go *with the flow*, rather than follow the Lord's directions.

And if the Lord happens to give you a special work to do, you can almost count on opposition.

So, what about it?

Is tribulation a sign that it really wasn't  
the Lord's will in the first place?

Should we evaluate His directions by the  
circumstances?

The disciples didn't think so.

They continued to pull to the other side,  
and so should we.

And if you study church history, you will  
find that the greater the work, the  
greater the opposition.

So press on into the storm!

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Well, Matthew 14:24 tells us the disciples  
were now "**in the middle of the sea,**"  
which according to John's Gospel, was 3  
or 4 miles from the shore.

It was a desperate situation, and the very  
person who had told them to launch forth  
was miles away.

He was up in a mountain, completely unaware  
of their struggle.

Is that right?

No, not at all.

In fact, Mark 6:48 tells us that way up in  
that mountain, in the middle of the  
night, and literally miles away---"**He saw  
them straining at rowing.**"

Have you ever felt all alone in the midst of  
your troubles?

I think we've all felt that way, haven't we?  
Well, it's not true.

Jesus sees us, and Jesus cares.

*Does Jesus care when my heart is pained  
Too deeply from mirth and song;  
As the burdens press, and the cares  
distress,*

*And the way grows weary and long?  
O yes, He cares: I know he cares,  
His heart is touched by my grief;*

*When the days are weary, the long nights  
dreary,  
I know my Savior cares.*

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Matthew 14:25 **"Now in the fourth watch of  
the night Jesus went to them, walking on  
the sea."**

Do you know what part of the night that is?  
The fourth watch is between 3 a.m. and 6  
a.m.

In other places, it's called the *morning*  
watch.

And, in fact, God chose the morning watch as  
the time when He would deliver Israel  
from their Egyptian masters.

We see that over in Exodus 14:23-24 **"And the  
Egyptians pursued and went after them  
into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's  
horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.  
Now it came to pass, in the morning**

**watch, that the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians."**

And you know the rest of the story.

Yes, God delivered Israel during the morning watch, and Jesus would deliver His disciples during the fourth watch.

In both cases, it was the darkest hour of their lives.

But, in actual fact, it was the moment of their deliverance.

Matthew 14:26 **"And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear."**

Let's stop for a moment to consider the disciples' surroundings.

They knew they were miles from land, three or four, to be exact.



It was dark, and they were in the middle of a tremendous storm.

They were looking for disaster, but they weren't looking for pedestrians.

No wonder **"they cried out for fear!"**

V 27 **"But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."**

And suddenly, everything changed.

Oh, the storm was still there, but so was Jesus.

And here's where we can glean a very important lesson from Peter's reaction, so don't miss it.

In a word, it's a lesson about attitude.

How did Peter deal with this horrendous storm that was threatening his life?

Did he say, *Is that you Lord? I hope you realize you've gotten us in a lot of*

*trouble. I'm a fisherman You know, and I  
knew this wasn't a good idea!*

Did he say that?

No, he didn't.

There wasn't a hint of blame.

Nor was he crippled by fear.

He wasn't pleading to be delivered from  
certain death.

No, when Peter saw Jesus, his tribulation  
became an opportunity.

Actually, he was the only disciple in the  
boat that saw it that way.

And it was a fleeting opportunity.

The minute Jesus reached the boat, the  
opportunity would be gone.

So, Peter's first words were---"**Lord, if it  
is You, command me to come to You on the  
water.**"

And you know what?

Jesus agreed.

Immediately, and no doubt with a great deal of enthusiasm, Jesus yelled back---

**"Come!"**

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Now, some people spend a lot of time majoring on the fact that Peter didn't make it, and certainly he didn't.

But wasn't Peter the only man in history, other than the Lord, of course, who ever walked on water?

Granted, he didn't get very far, but for a few glorious moments, Peter walked on the water!

V 30 **"But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"**

*Well, of course the wind was boisterous, Peter.*

*You've been fighting it all night.*

But when he got his eyes off Jesus, his opportunity became a tribulation once more.

And isn't that why our tribulations tend to sink us?

Oh, I know they're serious, maybe as serious as Peter's.

But the real reason we're overcome is because we've taken our eyes off the One who has **"overcome the world."**

We have forgotten that the tribulation that threatens to go over our heads is *under* His feet.

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And **"beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"**

I wouldn't be surprised if that was the shortest prayer in the Bible.

And it's a prayer that has special meaning for me.

For years, I commuted from my home in  
Woodstock to my employment in London.  
It was about a 30-mile trip along the 401.  
Well, I was going to work one fine winter's  
morning, the sun was shining, and the  
visibility was excellent.

There wasn't a bit of snow on the road, and  
I was traveling at my regular speed of  
100 kilometres per hour.

Suddenly, the back end of the car began to  
fishtail!

Apparently I had hit black ice, and each  
oscillation was becoming wider and wider.  
And when I realized the next one would take  
me off the road, I cried out, *Lord, help  
me!*

And I got instant results.

I hit bare pavement, and the car continued  
on its way as if nothing had happened.

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And so Peter, "beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Of course I have no way of knowing the tone Jesus used, but I rather think He was very disappointed, rather than angry. I'm sure He would have loved to see Peter make it all the way.

And did you notice He caught him first and admonished him second?

His care was stronger than His disappointment.

It was kind of like a loving father catching his little son during his first faltering steps.

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V 32-33 "And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in

**the boat came and worshiped Him, saying,  
"Truly You are the Son of God."**

Now that's a wonderful confession, but it  
was uttered *after* the storm was over.

Peter was the only disciple who put it to  
the test when the storm was raging.

And because Jesus was there, his tribulation  
had become an opportunity.

And it was a unique opportunity.

Peter never walked on the water again.

And you know what?

Each one of us has been given some unique  
opportunities, perhaps a few more than  
we're comfortable with.

They're called tribulations, and they're a  
blessing in disguise.

Actually, they're quite well disguised.

And if you're like me, you often miss the  
opportunity to increase your faith.

Instead of trusting Jesus, we concentrate on  
the storm . . . and sink.

Or, we just muddle through, feeling sorry  
for ourselves.

We've missed an opportunity to go where we  
have never gone before.

But don't despair.

I'm sure we'll get another chance to turn  
our calamities into opportunities.

Of course we might not get any further than  
Peter did, but the Lord will always be  
there to catch us.

And some day we might go all the way.

No, God's storms aren't meant to drown us.

They're simply a pathway to Christ.

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At the beginning of this lesson, we talked  
about some popular clichés that are  
supposed to deal with tribulation.

Here's another one:



*There's always light at the end of the tunnel.*

But, what if there isn't?

In the year 1820, a little six-month old girl got a cold in her eyes.

Because their regular doctor was away, her parents called another one, not realizing he was a fraud.

In his ignorance, he prescribed hot mustard poultices to be applied to the little girl's eyes.

When those bandages came down on her eyes the lights went out, and they never came on again.

Far from curing her, they had blinded her for life.

And so it was, when she had barely seen the light of day, this little girl was condemned to a lifetime of darkness.

What a tragedy!

But somehow, through the eyes of faith (for those were the only eyes she had) she saw her darkness as a pathway of light.

Yes, she actually considered her affliction to be a gift from God.

And at eight years old, she wrote her first recorded poem, a testimony to her philosophy of life:

*Oh what a happy soul I am!*

*Although I cannot see, I am resolved that  
in this world, contented I will be.*

*How many blessings I enjoy, that other  
people don't.*

*To weep and sigh because I'm blind, I  
cannot and I won't!*

Unfortunately, her father died when she was only 12 months old, leaving her mother without an income.

Consequently, even though she was a good and devoted mother, she had to go to work,

leaving her daughter in the care of her grandmother.

Her grandmother was a godly lady, and spent many hours with her granddaughter, describing the things of nature and of heaven.

She also made it her priority to introduce her to the Bible, and it was time well spent.

You see, God had given Fanny Crosby, for that was the little girl's name, a phenomenal memory.

In fact, she soon was able to quote entire books of the Bible.

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When Fanny grew to womanhood, she completely committed her life to the Lord.

And just like Peter, but for a much longer trip, she must have said---"**Lord, if it is You,**" if blindness is Your plan for my

life, then "**command me to come to You on  
the water,**"---and the Lord said, "**Come.**"

Down through the years, they walked the  
stormy seas together in sweet fellowship.

How do I know that?

Because the blessings she enjoyed have  
overflowed into the lives of countless  
believers.

During her life, she saw over 8,000 of her  
poems set to music.

In fact, she was so prolific that her  
publishers gave her as many as 200  
different pen names so the public  
wouldn't know she wrote so many.

In fact, her record is 7 poems in one day.

She was happily married to a blind musician  
and composer by the name of Alexander Van  
Alstyne who, like herself, was a teacher  
at the New York Institute of the Blind.

And then tragedy struck once again.

Their only child died while still a baby.  
And, finally, after a very full life, she  
went on to glory at the age of 95.

Some of her many hymns are:

*A Shelter in the Time of Storm*

*Jesus Is Calling*

*Near the Cross*

*Pass Me Not*

*Praise Him, Praise Him*

*Safe in the Arms of Jesus*

*Saved by Grace*

*Take the World but Give Me Jesus*

And --- *'Tis the Blessed Hour of Prayer.*

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A poem, written by Eliza Hewitt, was read at  
Fanny's funeral.

I'll just quote the last verse.

*"Good-bye, dearest Fanny, goodbye for a  
while,*

*You walk in the shadows no more;*

*Around you the sunbeams of glory will smile;  
The Lamb is the Light of that Shore!  
Someday we will meet in the City above;  
Together we'll look on His face;  
Safe, 'Safe in the Arms' of the Jesus we  
love;  
Together we'll sing, 'Saved by Grace!'"*

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So tonight, we have been considering tribulation in the light of our Lord's care---"**In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.**"

We've considered tribulation as the natural result of being loyal to our Lord Jesus--  
-"**Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.**"

And, finally, we have been looking at tribulation as an opportunity to draw nearer to Jesus.

And in that connection, we have considered one of God's servants who used her affliction, although she had never considered it to be that, as a means of blessing her brothers and sisters in the Lord.