PURPOSE *and* PERILS

CHRISTIAN MICHAEL

Purpose and Perils

Overcoming hurdles while making impact

Christian Michael

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Introduction

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or **peril**, or sword?*

Rom 8:35 KJV

Opposition only comes to a man who has taken a definite position. According to oxford dictionary, the word peril is defined as *serious danger.* There are dangers in fulfilling purpose. Every purpose is a warfare. It is my earnest opinion that anyone who desires to fulfill purpose should be equally ready for warfare. In executing our purpose we will be in direct combat with the enemy. The enemy would not want us to liberate her prisoners without a strong force. It is a terrible mistake to want to fulfill your purpose without expecting oppositions. *Oppositions as the name implies only reveals that we have taken a position.* The prince of darkness would rouse hell against any man who dares to stand out of the crowd. He would set several traps to indict the man. Where he could, he

would even kill the man. I have seen brethren who are seemingly oblivious of this fact. Should they encounter any negative thing, they would quickly sink down into discouragement. And more seriously some might even descend into the pit called *depression*.

When you speak with such brethren, you'll hear them say stuffs like, 'why me! I thought the Lord called me and things like that'. This attitude only reveals that they were not expecting what befell them. The enemy who has always been trying to paint God a wicked King would quickly seize the opportunity to make it look as if God is being unfaithful to His promises. However, we know that when He called us on mission, he did not promise us a smooth voyage but a safe one. The word says, *'in the world, you shall have tribulations...'*

Every purpose is executed in the world. It means that as long as I am in the world, it will really do me good if I expect tribulation. One thing about perils that is very noteworthy is that they are *revelation peels*. They are the quickest ways to know that you are doing something impactful. When life goes easy, it shows that the driver is taking the path that leads to hell. But when the sea is stirred, it reveals that we are heading heaven-ward.

My encounter with several soldiers on the road to destiny has revealed to me that many of us are not fully ready for what lies ahead. The hard truth is: we cannot avoid perils. If you aren't seeing them, then consider changing your route because you might as well be taking the wrong path. They are there at every bend like the check points along our roads to destiny. There is no man who has ever journeyed this path that escaped them. On the journey of purpose, perils are not only necessary but they are also mandatory.

Purpose is not fulfilled by mere children. Weak people are not enlisted in the enemy of the Lord. Passion alone cannot get the work done. We need turgidity. We need great staying power. We need resilience.

Let's hear from Paul:

*In journeyings often, in **perils of waters**, in **perils of robbers**, in **perils by mine own countrymen,** in **perils by the heathen**, in **perils in the city**, in **perils in the wilderness**, in **perils in the sea**, in **perils among false brethren**; 2 Cor. 11:26 KJV*

We could see this brother was on a journey. And this journey was not different from the one we are involved in. It was a journey in purpose. Perhaps we should re-emphasize again that purpose is a journey. It is not just

a journey but a composite of journeys and *journeyings*. In this journey, we can expect eight kinds of perils.

Chapter One

PERIL OF WATERS

The first peril a man of this mission must be mindful of is the peril of waters. Some versions call it the peril of rivers or the danger of rivers. What does this mean to us? They are perils that present themselves as we begin to experience the water that flows in the sanctuary. This is the peril of revival.

Wonderful enough, every missionary on purpose needs the rain; he needs the water. Water signifies the divine touch of God on a certain work. As we continue to move with the Lord, He moves us from water to water. However, these waters come with their perils. So there is a peril of waters. One may ask what kind of danger revival could bring along.

Even a casual peep at the scriptures will reveal several men that missed only at the time of rain. As I pondered, the first example that came readily to me is one brother in the time of Elisha. The story of this

brother is indeed a pathetic one. It is a painful thing to be trapped by the peril of the waters. This brother in question survived hardship. He passed the test of dryness. Several persons would readily overcome the time of dryness; time of no water. But unfortunately, many are caught in this peril of waters. This brother is one of such brothers. When it was time for heaven to release the waters, he doubted. The man of God, Elisha made the declaration by the word of God that the rain would be released soonest. But this servant of the King was caught in the sin of disloyalty to the king of kings. And what happened to him was a lesson for all of us.

Surely the word of God through His prophet came to pass. When this happened:

(Read carefully the following scripture to get the full gist.)

And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him.

And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel,

and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be tomorrow about this time in the gate of Samaria:

And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and ***he died.*** *2 Kings 7:17-20 KJV*

A lot happened but finally he died. My fear is that many would die at the gate of the waters. It makes it more serious for us to study this matter with soberness of heart. He was asked to man the gate to the Revival he did not believe which is a spiritual suicide mission. I have been wondering how one can be in hardship to the point of adapting to it. This deadly adaptation becomes even more deadly in such a way that some persons do not expect anything good from the Lord.

We also heard of the story of Ananias and the wife Sapphira who died at the waters. They died at the point when the church is experiencing the best of God's move. This trend must stop. For there to be advancement, there must be knowledge, and knowledge being an adequate one. We will study few perils of waters in details.

Conceit

Most men would be fine as long as they do not succeed. What we are looking at here are the perils that arise when we succeed. The oxford dictionary defines **conceit** as *having much pride in yourself and what you do.* To have pride in what one does and especially in what one is doing is very necessary to our success. This is often referred to as self-confidence. Many times success means self-confidence. The problem we are noting here is not just having pride but having **much** pride. One may ask what the danger in succeeding is. The only one I can think of is the risk of allowing the success get into the head.

In physics, the velocity in travelling up is not the same with the velocity in falling down. To climb up may take ten years but falling down ten minutes. To fall down, you only need to press the pride button. It blinks red by your left hand side as you travel up. As you go up, it becomes even more noticeable. In times of struggle, it is very likely that more people will put up. The ratio of those who will put up with struggle to those who will make it through success is weird. If you ask me I will say 70:30, if not more. Some people argue 80/20. Whichever you will notice the consistency of disparity in the negative.

There are some soft spots we must look out for.

We must beware of vain glory.

The matter we are about dealing with came to Nebuchadnezzar at a high cost.

The king spake and said, Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling-place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty? Dan 4:30 ASV

At a certain point of his journey, he decided to take a critical look at his achievements so far and discovered that he is even more powerful than he thought. If you have ever read the bible I suppose you are conversant with the story. So we are going to be focusing on the lesson for our lives. After he spent seven years with the animals in the forest, and was restored, he had this to advise us:

(Please do well to go through this)

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine ***understanding*** *returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:*

*And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed **as nothing**: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*

*At the same time **my reason** returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me.*

*Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that **walk in pride he is able to abase**. Dan 4:34-37 KJV*

According to Nebuchadnezzar, pride is a lack of understanding and reason. He told us that pride is totally unreasonable. It is only an offshoot of lack of understanding. That is what happens when men lose touch with what holds life together which is humility. When I was younger, I was advised thus: *pride kills*. Even now I think it is beyond that. Pride renders a man useless. What pride does is typified by the story of Nebuchadnezzar. When pride enters a life, such life returns to the position of a beast. It has a diminishing effect on the overall personality of the man.

For this brother it was seven years. Seven according to scriptures stands for completeness. It is completely debasing. Pride blinds a man from the input of partners. He begins to think that his input is the best of all. I think that pride has some element of foolishness in it. When pride is playing, five men can do a work and one will be feeling quietly that he alone did it in essence. Something begins to make him feel like at least his input must be the best of all. He tells himself that without him what could these do? Pride is a strange feeling; a product of wrong thoughts—*distorted thoughts.* In a proper evaluation, we are all nothing. Anytime we start thinking that we are something then we are making ourselves foolish.

For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself .Gal. 6:3 KJV

At the same time my reason returned unto me…

It is clear that his reason left him for a while. We must not allow our reason to go. Anytime pride wants to set in, take some time out and reason. Think about it and be reasonable. After a thorough analysis, we would come to know that there is no need to be proud after all.

The following are some guild posts that will help us in the waters:

- A man does not receive anything unless it has been given to him from above.
- Whatever success we experience in life, it is as a result of our might but a product of collective effort of others.
- I am better of when I don't ponder much on what I have achieved.
- It is only safe to give to God than to take glory for myself.

Chapter Two

PERIL OF ROBBERS

As we journey, we would meet robbers. When you see a robber, he is out for just one business—it is to take people's valuables. There is something you have that you need to hold fast. There are those whose work on this path is to steal from people their vision and purpose. Unlike the physical robbers, they do not appear with guns and claws. Yet they are armed. Some are armed with lies while there are those who are armed with deceit. You could also find those who are armed with intimidation.

When they point these weapons against you, all they desire is that you drop what the Maker has given you and walk away. It is for this reason we must study this matter closely. I must inform you that several have been successfully robbed. They had a dream and went to share it with a robber. And immediately after that conversation they lost the dream that once burned in their heart. They simply surrendered their dream to

the threatening of the robber. The strategy of the robber is threat. A robber can go any mile to threaten you to drop your purse and walk away. You must not walk away.

When I started out to pursue what the Lord had laid in my heart for my generation, I met many robbers. I thank God they did not succeed. All they mean to me is that I should forgo the mission and join them in mediocrity. There are old prophets who are specialists in stealing people's vision. Share your vision with them and they could take a whole day to let you know how it will not come through. They would look at your educational background, your height and your financial status. Then they would embark on such an elaborate analysis all pointing to the fact that you are not qualified to do what the Lord is saying you can do. This is where several persons stopped their journey. They agreed with the thief and surrendered their heart to them.

There is nothing as devastating as living a life without purpose. It could not be for lack of purpose as it is. But the case is usually the issue of stolen dreams; aborted visions. What has been stolen can still be recovered. This is the good news of the twenty-first century.

You can trace your path back to where it was stolen. The thieves don't usually do anything with it. They have nothing to do with your purpose. No man can actually operate another man's purpose. Every purpose is tailor-made to suite their owner. Just go back there and pick it up; take back what belongs to you.

Guidepost against this peril

- Nobody can take what belongs to me unless I give it to them
- I have been given the charge to take care of and protect whatever the Maker has given me.
- There are robbers whose work is to rob me of my vision or dream but they can't succeed if I discover and avoid them.
- Whatever happens, I can always recover whatever has been lost, be it passion or desire to purpose a certain course.

Chapter three

PERIL OF COUNTRYMEN

We are not alone. We belong to a global family of the redeemed of God. As we set out on this journey, we must keep in mind that we are not alone. There are countrymen—men of like passion. They are not rivals but countrymen. With them, we have common enemy and standing side by side with them in common battle. Our countrymen are there to cheer us up when need be and encourage us where necessary. This is a common patriotic duty we owe ourselves as countrymen. However, there are perils that arise from countrymen.

A brother offended (is harder to be won) than a strong city; And (such) contentions are like the bars of a castle. Prov. 18:19 ASV

It is painful to be hurt by another but it is even more painful to be hurt by a brother. The pain is like hell. As we journey we must expect this peril. It is only natural

to be careful with those who are outside but for a brother, we can easily conclude that we are together. What is it you can expect from fellow countrymen?

1. **Envy and jealousy**

Envy: the feeling of wanting to be in the same situation as somebody else;

The feeling of wanting something that somebody else has[1].

Envy is often used interchangeably with jealousy. But in my opinion they are not exactly the same. Jealousy is a direct inverse of envy. Whereas envy is about coveting what others have, jealousy is feeling that others should not have what we have. As we journey, we will meet these two categories of people. And often they are usually countrymen.

There will be those who will so be angry at us that we are doing what we are called to do in the way God has asked us. Moses had this issue, so do others. For Moses, first it was a certain group of brethren led by Bro Korah. Then later it was Aaron and Miriam his own blood brethren. Envy in the heart of your countrymen will make them outrightly deny all the grace of God open your life. Even while others are getting blessed and glorifying God, they would still mock. You could

imagine how two hundred and fifty people stood against Moses that he was over using the privilege of being their leader. Now my question, who gave Moses the privilege of being a prophet? Obviously, it was not those guys rather it was God Himself. And apparently, God was not having any problem with whether or not Moses was over using what he has been given. At the root of that rebellion is envy.

Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men:

And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty ***princes*** *of the assembly,* ***famous i****n the congregation,* ***men of renown****:*

And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, ***Ye take too much upon you****, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD? Num 16:1-3KJV*

You would be amazed where your envy would be coming from. It was as if these men have nothing to themselves. They were *princes*, they were *famous* in

the congregation and also men of *renown*. The amplified version puts it this way: *men well known and of distinction.* You see these men were not nonentities. They had all things going well for them. But they still wanted that one Moses had. This is what makes this envy more painful. You can find a king being Jealous of a small shepherd boy as in the case of David.

It is envy that made the Pharisees to incite the crowd countless times against our Lord Jesus. Certain people can go all the way to be generating problems for you. Now we know what the matter is with them. Though we cannot ignore its pain, we can learn from our predecessors on how to respond.

Envy is a distraction and must be treated as such. If we abandon our journey with the Lord and begin to concentrate on proving ourselves right before envy then we have failed. They might point out your mistake, but it is not the mistake that is the problem. Scripture reveals that *envy is like the rottenness of the bones (Prov. 14:30).* Medically speaking, amputation is the only cure for such a case. Your argument and defense would avail nothing. Just move on. Just keep doing what you are doing, and your result will answer some questions for you.

2. **Bitterness and hatred**

In the scheme of things, envy leads to bitterness and bitterness produces hatred. But envy is not the same as bitterness.

Bitterness**: feeling angry and unhappy because you feel that you have been treated unfairly[2].** It is somewhat funny but it happens. Someone somewhere thinks he had been cheated. And he wonders why it must be you. Anytime they see you, it appears as if you are actually occupying the position meant for them. This is serious! Usually the victim of bitterness does not understand why the bitterness. I have been a victim of this severally. On one occasion, I had just arrived a certain mission field, without saying anything neither good nor bad some brethren just hated me. When I would climb the pulpit to preach, a certain brother would outrightly exit through the next door. He did this for months until God gave me wisdom on how to handle it. I would go home wondering what I had done and where I had done wrong.

One day a sister just walked up to me and told me to my face, 'bro mike I hate you. I just want to let you know I hate you. And I don't know why, but I just hate you'. I was so shocked to my bones. I managed to mutter few words out of my confusion, 'sister, I have

heard you, and I just want you to know that I love you'. When I think about this very incidence, sometimes it leaves me laughing other times it just keeps me thinking. This is one of many examples.

Bitterness and hatred is a peril every man on the journey of purpose must experience. Unfortunately this also is where many brethren give in and give up. They also become bitter, sink into murmuring and discouragement. As soon as a servant of God misses his bearing along this line, the devil is always available to provide a remedy. His remedy is usually breaking of fellowship with the brethren. This one is worse than bitterness itself. Bitterness can come from young or old; rich or poor. All we are to do at that point is to ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom.

And his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren; and they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? Or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his ***dreams****, and for his words. Gen 37:4, 8 ASV*

The problem is the same. It is still because of your dreams. When you decide to take a stand while others are comfortable on their stomach, they will definitely revolt against you. Most persons would not rise up from mediocrity and follow their dreams or even dare to dream a dream. But when they see someone who has risked dreaming, they will be indignant against such one. This is my joke about dreams: it is not easy to dream dreams. For you to dream, you have to sleep deep enough, which means to risk death. So everybody should dream their own dream and allow others to also do so. If you fall into the shoes of Joseph, don't worry, before they realize it, they have sold you into the will of God.

3. Strife and contention

The last manifestation of the peril of countrymen from our study is *strife and contention.*

And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together. For their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.

*And there was a **strife** between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land.*

*And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no **strife**, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen. **For we are brethren** Gen 13:6-8 ASV*

Strife: **angry or violent disagreement between two people or groups of people**[3]

Strife is foremost a lifestyle then an event. Some people just will strife with you. Now this was Abraham and his son Lot. They claimed that the land was not able to contain them for largeness of their possession. But we also noticed that there were other persons dwelling in the same land at that time. My question is, 'why was it just between Abraham and Lot?'

Taking a close look at the situation, you will notice that if it were two 'Abrams' they could co-habit just fine. There was something in Lot that would not permit that. If you follow the story down to the destruction of Sodom where Lot lived, you would understand that as at that time Lot had no more servants while before then he had three hundred of them. Perhaps the land also became too small for Lot and his servants. This land we are talking about is an entire country of Canaan compared to two persons. That is what we are dealing with.

When strife enters, the land becomes smaller. Men begin to seek for more space for themselves. Behind whatever excuse that may be projected, you would notice that quiet desire to be a local champion. It is usually a quiet longing to shine and conquer alone. This desire, if allowed to develop to maturity, turns partners to rivals. *A man struggling with strife within, cannot network with others without*. What goes on inside determines what we manifest outside.

Strife breeds contention and sometimes physical combat. You can't imagine men skimming to get other men out of office because the entire company has grown too small to accommodate both of them. Some would go as far as laying accusations to the detriment of others. Should you see this, remember that it is all part of it. ***Plan your victory strategy***. Let us borrow wisdom from Father Abraham:

Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If (thou wilt take) the left hand, then I will go to the right. Or if (thou take) the right hand, then I will go to the left.

And Jehovah said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward.

For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth. So that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then may thy seed also be numbered.

Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it. For unto thee will I give it

Gen 13: 9, 14-17 ASV

There are some measures of God we would not get into unless we separate from certain of our brethren. There is no room for strife. The land is before us. A wise man wrote, 'the sky is too wide that if all the birds decide to fly at the same time, there won't be clashes'. The same is true about purpose. We cannot take another's place and nobody can take ours. But in case along the line someone feels the land is too small for both of us, be kind enough to separate from such person.

There is need for networking, but there is time for separation. We must be sensitive to know it when this time comes. To authenticate our purpose is to prove that we can execute it anywhere, without anybody. There are managers who sink into pity party just because an employee left them. This isn't necessary at all. Because we are on for something,

some friends must leave us. I read somewhere, '*when you are going up, you're bound to lose company and if you are not losing company, it means you are stagnant'*. This is because very few people go up. Like the saying goes, 'it's lonely at the top'.

I believe that Abraham had seen the need for this separation but didn't know how to initiate it. Or rather he was too emotional like some of us to do the right thing. Perhaps he had hoped Lot would change in due course. He might have assured himself, 'my God does not fail, and He will definitely answer me and change Lot'. How wrong he was! God does not want to change Lot rather He wants Abraham to leave Lot alone and move on. If Lot means the same thing as in English, then it means *luggage*. There are some relationships we have carried that are actually functioning like a luggage in our Journey. Lot might not stop you, but Lot will definitely slow your pace towards destiny. Do not forget, '*to every purpose is a given time*' (Eccles. 3:1).

When you see a Lot you will know. They are not easy to cope with. They are full of faultfinding. And it is only Lot that always sees that you are very arrogant and proud. He does not agree with your vision or strategy. He seizes every opportunity that presents itself to put you down before others. Lot does not celebrate you

though he envies you behind. He only tolerates you. ***According to Mike Murdock, 'don't stay where you are tolerated but where you are celebrated.*** And lastly, Lots make it look as if your presence is depriving their assess provender to feed on. When this happens, know it's time to go. ***The best part of the land is not to be compared to the best part of your purpose.*** So be willing to leave the best part of the land for Lot. Sometimes you have to allow Lot to leave. And there are times when you have to leave for Lot. Whichever way, Lot must go. If you think that Lot is your wife, you're only unfortunate because she is your life partner and must stick with you forever. Prayer is an available tool.

Chapter four

PERIL OF THE HEATHENS

Who is a heathen? Simply put, a heathen is a stranger. The understanding is that we are from somewhere. We are citizens of a particular kingdom. And anyone that is not from that kingdom is regarded as a stranger. One thing about strangers is that they act strange. I also believe if you ask them, they would also say concerning us that we act strange. So we can say that we are strange to our strangers. This also means that they also see us as strangers. It is a matter of kingdom; territorial difference.

On this side you think she is a stranger while on the other side, she considers you a strange person. So before unbelievers there is always a quarrel. I have seen brethren trying all their possible best to become one with heathens. And they begin to feel something is actually wrong with them whenever they fail in their effort. But the truth is that nothing is wrong with you.

These are simply strangers. Their ways are not our ways and their thoughts are not our thoughts. Moses told Pharaoh:

And Moses said, it is not suitable or right to do that; for the animals the Egyptians hold sacred and will not permit to be slain are those which we are accustomed to sacrifice to the Lord our God; if we did this before the eyes of the Egyptians, would they not stone us? Exod. 8:26 (AMP)

You could see the problem. What the Egyptians hold sacred we hold light. And what we hold sacred they hold light. That is the conflict. The only option available to the Egyptians is stoning. They would not spare. This stoning is what we call ***persecution.***

The funniest thing about persecution is that the persecutor does not see himself as one. He usually has a different understanding of himself. Several times it is an action that evolves from a heart that is discontented with a certain behavioral pattern. Often than not, persecution is but a reaction. There are times where it is a response of someone who has just been so inconvenienced that he could not bear it anymore. Let us see persecution as the way unbelievers express their lack of understanding of what and how we do what we do.

Come to think of it, they hate this stuff and they wish we would not talk or do it again. But on our side, this is not just what we do occasionally, but our lifestyle. Moses said, '*...for the animals the Egyptians hold sacred and will not permit to be slain are those which we are accustomed to sacrifice to the Lord our God'.* Can you imagine it when someone's hurt is that which you are accustomed to doing. I believe it really hurts. I know you wouldn't like me at this point but I will manage. Can we try to understand these people?

Somehow, it looks like they would be thinking that we don't care at all. We just keep going on and on right on someone's toes. And somehow we don't show any sign of remorse or future repentance because that is just our life. Little wonder persecution must continue. Let me bet you, if you just backslide, every persecution will automatically seize. Even our Lord Jesus said:

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Where is the world? Right here! We are in him and also in the world. So we will have peace and also have tribulations. It must come. The best response is to prepare for it. And a better understanding of this matter will help us respond more maturely. When you

see brethren struggling with persecution, you'll quickly know that they have a wrong understanding of the matter. We must settle that it is not one of those spiritual fights. It is not a fight at all. Therefore we don't retaliate. We understand and absorb the shock. Sometimes they'd accuse us of being proud and would call us all manner of names. Just remember it's only a reaction. Whenever I think this, it gives me a lot of peace and I would just smile.

Benefit of persecutions

Blessed (happy, to be envied and spiritually prosperous—with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of your outward conditions) are you when people revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil things against you falsely on My account.

Be glad and supremely joyful, for your reward in heaven is great (strong and intense), for in this same way people persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matt. 5:11-12 (AMP)

If there was anything that should not have an advantage I think it should be persecution. But somehow, we are all wrong on the matter. So many times I read this scripture and wondered so what is the

advantage. We only saw that there is going to be a reward, strong and intense. But the reward was not mentioned. But as I looked at it more closely today, I think I am seeing something. Just beneath that exhortation was a comment, '*for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*'. There we can see that the entire scripture has something to do with that comment.

Like every student in any university has one thing in common—*admission,* so is this issue. Every student who has not passed through this process cannot be said to be a student. It is usually followed by a kind of celebration that is called matriculation in some countries. Why this celebration? It is because someone is saying at least now I can call myself a student. It doesn't matter when these guys there joined this institution but now I am proudly one of them. So it is strong and intense. That's it.

Persecution is the admission process for us into the journey of purpose. Every fellow who passed this road had it. And it is just the same road for everyone. So if you aren't having it, it shows that you are on the wrong path. It is time when the church will be trusting God for persecution then throwing a party when we have them in their numbers. What do you think?

When you think the tide is against you, it means you are moving in a definite direction. Those who do not have a definite direction cannot experience the effect of the tide. They just move by the tide. In fact the tide provides them with direction. And journey looks smooth all the time. However, this is not the same with purpose. *Purpose can be defined as a journey towards a specific direction called destiny.*

There is more to persecution:

For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.

Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins.

Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.

This is the most interesting part of the gist. Persecution serve as a tool for our refining. The Lord permits it to refine the life of His servants. The scorching heat of persecution provides at the end a refining effect on the soul of the missionary. We won't be our God-best unless men are allowed to ride over our heads. Some fruits of the spirit required for our progress can only develop in a harsh environment.

And the heathens, though unconsciously, creates this environment for us. It has been noted in the church history that the church thrive more during persecution. And a church born out of persecution is usually more spiritually healthy than that church enjoying a peaceful atmosphere.

3 Facts to keep in mind:

- Love is developed in hate
- Patience is crafted out of hardship
- Light shines our of darkness

We must not forget:

'*You are a poor specimen if you can't stand pressure of adversity.' Prov.24:10 (LB).*

Another version puts it this way:

'If you fall to pieces in a crisis, there wasn't much to you in the first place' (MSG)

Most times maturity means who can carry on when the chips are down.

<u>Who is strong among you?</u>
All strength must be tested
And all bravery revealed.
It's just a matter of time. *~ Message from the devil*

Let's get back to the discussion between Moses and Pharaoh and glean further wisdom from it.

*If we did this before the eyes of **the Egyptians**, would they not stone us? Exod. 8:26 (AMP)*

[Egyptians here represent the heathens according to our study]

From what we have gathered so far, we can conclude that persecution is right in the will of God for our lives. However, not all persecutions are the will of God. There are times when brethren attract persecutions on their own. It is not wisdom to invite persecution because for all we know, persecution slows our journey.

There are things we must not do before the Egyptians. We must be discerning enough to know these things. There are some dreams we must not share before the Egyptians. There are some experiences we must not share before the Egyptians. The contrary is not wise to do. We would do several things but some not before the eyes of the Egyptians. See, if you don't heed this advice from Moses, be ready for stoning. Yes! Surely they will definitely stone you. Be mindful of those stuffs that are detestable to the Egyptians.

The wilderness is the best place to serve the Lord in some certain realm. The Egyptians also include those who are not with you in this journey. They are not going with you so why show them the details of the sacrifice involved? They would like to know all about it but would not consider taking the first step with you. Don't tell them. Insist on going a three-day journey into the wilderness far away from them.

We must prepare for persecution. But any persecution that is not from the Lord must be avoided. Wisdom is profitable to direct.

Chapter five

PERIL IN THE CITY

The city of Zion is very wide. And the operation of the king is also very vast in such a way that it is difficult for one person to fully understand everyone. Therefore, like what looked like a plague, Zion is full of *misunderstanding*. And this is the Peril in the city.

Everyone in the city and on a *journey* has experienced this at one point or the other. It is not unique to you so take it easy with yourself. Paul, writing to the brethren in Corinth said thus:

Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps His praise, and He will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm. 1 cor. 10:13(GNB)

The major matter we all experience about this peril is that we suddenly begin to feel like it's our personal problem. Severally you'll see brethren complain, 'what

have I done; what shall I do?' All these complaints would not have been necessary if the servant of God on mission understands that this is just one of those things. There are those who would utilize all the time of their purpose in explaining themselves and trying to prove themselves right. They would go from one elder of the city to another, then from one man to another. What is the usual result of such explanations? More confusion!

If you are in this peril now, I know that the only idea coming to your mind is to go and prove yourself. I cannot say that there is no time for us to explain our ministry. Paul advised us to be ready to give account of our ministry whenever necessary. However, in the peril of the city, this is not an idea at all. The people actually do not need the explanation in the first place. They are only offended because you are doing something different. The only explanation they require is that you stop doing what you are doing and be like one of them, and then there will be peace. As for your explanation, no one needs it.

It is only naturally for people to oppose what they do not understand. And we are not permitted at this point to distract ourselves with satisfying people's quest for vain knowledge. Rather we are here to make impact,

where making impact means solving a distinct problem. There are those who would ask, 'what are these folks doing; what do they think they are doing?' And as long as it does not fit into their tiny minds, they would kick against it. We must also have this in mind: among the times allotted to us by heaven, there was no time for explanations. The Lord desires that our result should speak for us. We must all possess a certain spirit: *the spirit of resilience.*

Let's resolve this in our heart once and for all. What we must consistently endeavor to keep and project is the result. This is the attitude of winners. They put in all their best to get the result and keep maintaining the result and then they allow the results to speak for them. There is a story I cherish so much in the Holy Bible. I think my most favorite. It's about a man born blind in JOHN 9. This man according to the story had not seen throughout his life. And perhaps because of his terrible condition was abandoned by his own family members beside the miracle pool *Bethesda.* Now the Lord Jesus came in to the scene, and as usual, healed this man.

But the Pharisees do not like Jesus because they feel He is not functioning according to the requirement of the law. At some point they had even argued about the

source of His power. When they heard the news of the man who had been healed, they foamed, murmured and queried.

John 9:16-17

*Therefore said some of the Pharisees, **This man is not of God**, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.*

They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet.

They had problems with the methods of Jesus but the result of Jesus was stirring strong at them. They struggled to prove it was a lie. Some came up with a kind of brilliant idea, 'are you sure this man was truly blind?' At that point they had to call in the parents to verify. When they got the answer, they now resorted to hearing from the man. I suspect that they felt that they could at least stop this man from believing in Jesus. And there strategy was to separate the person of Jesus from the works of Jesus. They thought, 'we agree with the miracle but it does not mean this man is good. We still hate him'. How wrong they are!

The story continued thus:

28 Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples.

29 We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.

30 The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes.

31 Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.

32 Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

33 If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.

I think this blind man was a little bit harsh on them this time. Can you imagine these Pharisees? They are everywhere. They are men, who will see a notable miracle like this and pretend as if they can't see it because they do not like the fellow that performed it. It is actually a strange matter. We saw how they shifted the discussion to the laws of Moses instead of concentrating on the result. Did you notice their major

problem? They said, we know about Moses, but for this man we don't know where he comes from.

The problem here is a matter of genealogy. They are asking, 'who is your Father?' what is your family history; how can a tree sprout out of Nazareth? It was confusing to them. They could not understand it so they tried to refute it. Most times it is your academic qualification that would be the matter. And other times it could be your denominational background. Like a man of God asked me, 'how can you join a dead church and living church together in the name of fellowship? And how can you *(that's me),* coming from a dead church preach to someone from a living church'. I watched him wrestle with this matter with his wife also standing by bewildered. The matter is, ***'where does this fellow come from?'***

See my friend's response in *verse 30*:

The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes.[KJV]

Why, that's very strange! The man replied. He can heal blind men, and ye you don't know anything about him! [Living Bible]

The man replied, well, this is astonishing! Here a Man has opened my eyes, and yet you do not know where He comes from [that is amazing!]. (AMP)

As at that time, this once blind man was the most surprised man that was on earth. He wondered, 'what could be wrong with this people; How could a man who has the power to open the eyes of the blind be residing among the people and they claimed they do not know anything about him?' And he simply said, 'it's amazing!' To this blind man, it's a very simple riddle to solve, especially for those who had eyes—*if he opened the eyes of the blind, then he must be from God.* But obviously and surprisingly, they did not know it. So they kept asking question upon questions.

There is yet another side of this story. If I may ask you, 'where was Jesus during all these arguments? He could just be sitting somewhere with friends and chilling. Perhaps he was attending a birthday party of a friend. Or he might even be somewhere performing more miracles. See the part that interests me most in this story: this man speaking up for Jesus had not yet seen Him. He does not even know His name. He was anointed and sent to wash, before he could come back seeing and to check on the man that had anointed him, the crowd and the Pharisees would not allow him. So

while he was still trying to teach the Pharisees some bible, he was still looking around to check, if he could see any big man sitting somewhere that he can suspect and attribute the miracle to. Meanwhile the wicked Pharisees would not dare mention his name to this man. You get the picture?

Your result will speak. Your presence or name is not the major thing here. Just get the result and keep at it. Even those who do not know you would defend you. Many brethren like me have suffered in the hand of church as they stepped out in pursuit of purpose. Some have been blackmailed, insulted and suspended. However, when the results begin to pour in, it became almost irresistible for those who once spoke against you to come to you, especially when God has placed something they need in your hands.

Consistency is the key.

Consistency says: 'is it right?

Then do it, and as you start,

Don't stop doing it.

It will be praised later.'

Once someone asked, 'where do I focus on?' Here's my answer, '*concentrate on the work'*. Our Lord Jesus

understood this vividly. He ensured that the brethren in the city do not distract Him. He did not at any time seek to make Himself understood. He just kept doing what He was sent to. In one of His testimonies Jesus said:

*I told you, and ye believed not: **the works** that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.*

John 10:25(ESV)

At another time He said:

*But if I do, though ye believe not me, **believe the works:** that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.*

John 10:38 KJV

We could see the attitude he had. This is the type we must also have. Time spent in arguments is a waste. Time spent in trying to be like others is a misuse. And time spent on defending self is an abuse.

Chapter six

PERIL IN THE WILDERNESS

A wilderness, according to oxford advanced learner's dictionary, [1]*is a large area of land that has never been developed or used for growing crops because it is difficult to live there.*

[2]*A place that people do not take care of or control.*

If you ask me, I will say that ***a wilderness*** is not a very nice place to visit. We will also add that a wilderness is not in any way the best place to live. However, the wilderness is a compulsory place to visit. The hard truth is that the road that leads to destiny passes through the wilderness. So we can therefore conclude that any man that ever reached destiny must have visited the wilderness. Whereas we may wish or even pray that the wilderness be averted in our journey, the Father had included the wilderness experience as a compulsory part of our journey. Therefore wisdom requires that instead of wishing away this package, we rather learn to understand and prepare for it.

There are those who have become very skilful in avoiding the wilderness. Where that is the case, the Holy Spirit would usually intervene. He would do this by personally arranging and leading the disciple to the wilderness like we saw in the case of the Lord Jesus.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil

Matt 4:1 KJV

Now, we are not saying that the Lord was in anyway avoiding the wilderness, the emphasis here is rather on the Holy Spirit. Humans, if left alone would not naturally go towards the wilderness. Some persons would claim that they do not know the road that leads there. But thank God for the Holy Spirit who will always lead us to the right places even when these places are not the favorites.

Meanwhile we are not just talking about the wilderness but the peril in the wilderness. Our focus in this study will be on the peril in the wilderness. The peril in the wilderness wraps around ***loneliness***.

To be alone is not exactly to be lonely. But to be lonely can also mean to be alone. Loneliness is a matter of the heart. It is more internal than external. The period of loneliness for every servant of God on mission is a very

defining one. These are times when kings are made and when giants are defeated. Like we noted earlier, it is compulsory. We must note this: it is not a destination in itself, but a necessary drive-way. Misunderstanding usually arises when brethren begin to treat that little bend as a destination other than a by-pass. When this happens, they tend to settle down and allow the weight of the matters that come along the wilderness to affect their heart.

Paul in the wilderness

For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.

2 Tim 4: 10, 16 (KJV)

It is only normal for the man of God on mission to be in need of the company of the brethren. However, when the company of the brethren becomes our priority, then it becomes a matter. There are times when the Lord will bring brethren our way to provide for us. This provision can be in form of cash or kind. The major need of the missionary if you ask me is the

need for encouragement. Most of us are weak while others are strong. But the truth is, either strong or weak, we all need encouragements.

There are times when we need it even more desperately. Even the bravest in the Lord's army, at some point will be destitute of the great need. And it is not a problem. That you are hurt when you are left alone only shows that you are human. Paul felt so too and anybody could. Now let's look at what the Lord would want us learn from this.

Paul was left alone at a very crucial time of his journey. It was his first answer. He had wished that some brethren would stand with him. As we observed, it is easy to note that Paul might not be really interested in having all the brethren. There are specific brethren he wished should have been there. I could hear Paul, 'if only Demas was here; if Titus was around'. The presence of these brethren meant a lot to Paul. They had been his partners and fellows. Their presence in the auditorium of defense will do much in succor to the heart of this brother.

Perhaps as Paul would start speaking, he would look in their direction and a nod of support would go a long way. But they were not there. This was a shock to Paul. Perhaps they did not even give him an earlier notice.

He came expecting the brethren already seated to cheer him. I can relate with the pain he felt. A certain time in my life I also came to a point where I needed the brethren in my life. I had lost my Dad which for me then meant all hope was almost lost. I believe this death contributed in keeping me at home for five years after my high school while my mates were going to the university.

To make matter worst, within this time, my mama was seriously sick. She could not be admitted because there was no money. Her illness almost took food away from our table. But I thank God it only took meat away. At least we had soup with no meat. As a new believer, it bothered me that my senior brethren all became so busy that they forgot I needed them. If you allow me, I can mention some names like Paul did. It is not actually all the brethren that I had wanted to see. Of course there were some persons around me. All I can say sincerely is that they could not feel the gap in my heart. So I was hurt.

These times do come. For me, they have come more than thrice since then. They are always around at every bend. Like Paul, it is only natural to conclude that we were forsaken. Something within us will sum it as a deliberate act by the brethren. Actually it is this feeling

that drives the nail harder into our heart. But with a closer look, it is not always the case.

Paul's response

I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.

Whatever be the case, our response in this matter is the most crucial of the issues. Paul prayed for them. He did not *pray* against them rather he prayed for them. This kind cannot go except by the understanding which the Holy Spirit gives. Some people would have reported them to the Lord by their murmuring. But Paul ensured that he did not do nor say anything that would implicate these brethren before the Lord.

If you are the one in this matter, what would be your response? Won't it at least form a sermon topic for you? Most people would go about sharing it like a testimony—*what the brethren did to me when I needed them the most*. Paul showed us how to respond in situations like this.

Jesus in the wilderness

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

It was time for the Lord to face purpose. He prayed like he used to. And he trusted God like He used to. But somehow, he needed someone to be with Him. There were brethren. But he carefully sought for just three. These three have become His closest companions, he thought. But it struck again. I believe He was disappointed. He wondered why they could not understand that He needs them this time. Perhaps they also thought that He should be strong since He has been always strong. There was misunderstanding in the air.

Like the song writer said, *'we may not know, we cannot tell, what pain he had to bear'*. It is most difficult to fully understand what another brother is going through. There are times we argue, 'I understand; sister, I understand you!' but the truth remains that we may not know and we cannot tell. There are times when we have to consult he that wears the shoe to fathom what is going on underneath. The Lord was in trouble, He was not alone but He was lonely. It was some wilderness stuff.

When everything looked hopeless on earth, He decided to try the next alternative which is heaven. Now His disciples had all fled leaving Him all alone. I

supposed our Lord turned to heaven as the only hope for sustenance. What did He get?

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Matt 27:46KJV

This is not a cry for victory or for defeat. It is a cry of disappointment; loneliness. It is a cry for help. He had a relationship with the One whom He called. He cried, 'My God, My God!' He did not call out for a stranger. There was an existing relationship. At this point, He demanded for some kind of explanation. He could not understand 'why'. 'But why me', He muttered. 'This is unbelievable', He kept saying to Himself. Could this be true? No Mary, no Martha, no Peter, no John and now, no God. What have I done?

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice

So the scripture revealed that He cried with a loud voice. He was actually in pain. It was about the *ninth hour*. This ninth hour must come for every man on this path. There would be a ninth hour when you would cry with a loud voice. Perhaps you have been crying but not with a loud voice. We have not said that you have not experienced anything hard. Maybe you were able

to manage it and cry like a man. And perhaps you did manage them and put a little show of deep remorse here and there. Then I must inform you and you must prepare your heart very early towards this matter. We saw the strongest man in human history cry with a loud voice. It was a bone-touching experience.

Jesus' response

Now the *crying* is not the problem. Like the song writer rightly said,

'for friend beloved, no longer near submissive still would I still reply thy will be done'.

After chiding His disciples for not standing with Him in the hour when He needed them most, he moved on. I believe that Peter was moved by the touching words of His friend who was seemingly in pain as He spoke to them the third time. So he jumped up, mobilized his team members to start praying. By that time, it was already done:

Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

Matt 26:45-46KJV

He simply said, 'it's okay!' It was not time to begin arguments. Neither was it time to begin a long sermon on how the man of God was disappointed with the attitude of his members. Those things were not the matter to Him. He had submitted everything to God; He had submitted to the will of God and it does not matter what man did or did not do. And the next moment, he was in fellowship again. We have seen instances where brethren stopped fellowshipping because certain brethren did not come and visit them when they were sick or so. The Lord would not do such a thing.

Though he cried to His God who seemed to have forsaken Him, He still said, '*into your hands, I commit my spirit'*. By this He had said, 'though I don't understand this hour, and I can't feel you around me now, I still believe you are there and you are there for me so I give you what remains of me'. That's the response.

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, ***I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee****. Heb 13:5 KJV*

Perhaps I must say this very quickly, 'God is faithful'. He doesn't bridge any contract. He keeps His promise with any man irrespective of age, race, sex or nationality. And one of His commitments to us is that He does not forsake. You may have been too engrossed with problem that you can't see His face again. Even at that point when you can't see His face, He is still there.

Chapter seven

PERIL IN THE SEA

*When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; **and through the rivers,** they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.*

Isaiah 43:2

As I read this scripture this morning, the Holy Spirit whispered to my heart, 'there is a time to pass through waters and there is a time to pass through rivers'. When we pass through waters, the promise of the Father is that He will be with us. We have earlier looked at what it means to pass through waters. No matter the depth of the water, we can rest assured that He who has brought us thus far will be with us through it. And one thing about His presence is *that in His presence there is no casualty.*

Moreover, there is also a time to pass through the rivers. It is this combination of rivers that compose the

sea. When we talk about the seas we speak about trouble. The Living bible translation puts it this way:

When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you walk through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown...

One thing we must keep in mind is that there is never a smooth road to destiny. The kind of church we have these days is that which is too afraid of trouble. The church has invented several kinds of prayers and programs that are aimed at avoiding trouble. This aberration is mostly revealed by the kind of songs we sing these days in our services.

It is very easy to hear a preacher speak for one hour about how a Christian should not suffer. And you can imagine the jubilant reaction of the congregation. I wish this false hope were altogether true in a manner that it will successfully exonerate us from trouble. Unfortunately, it does not. Instead it only breeds an unprepared church; a church that when trouble hits will melt in a twinkle of an eye as if it were never there. These wrong emphases have helped in building a very weak church whereas the Lord expects his children to be soldiers. In all these one can honestly ask, *'what is the Lord saying?'*

Now the Lord says, 'when' not 'if'. It presupposes that the 'sea of trouble' is an inevitable bend in our journey. The first time I saw this scripture was when as a teenager and a young believer I had lost my earthly father. The question I kept asking was, 'Lord, why must I pass through them if they will not swallow me?'. I can't recall if the Lord answered me or not. But I think I have got the answer now after several years of journeying with Him. I must add this very quickly, there are times when the Lord prefers keeping quiet. And most of the times it is when we are in the seas. If he must speak sometimes, it is very brief and concise.

Perhaps you have not got to the sea yet. I beg you to prepare your heart because you must get there. It could be that you are currently sailing through streams and creeks. Somehow certainly you will by-pass them to the sea. I must also add quickly that there are times when the Lord leads us through the path of still waters. It is all part of the journey. At the point when we move pass the still waters to the sea, many falter.

The sea is characterized by turbulence. The waves are nobody's friend. They are not there to make anyone smile. What we can't say for sure is whether they have come particularly against us or they are just coming in their season (as it has been foreordained) by the

creator. It is normal for anybody in the storm to conclude that it is come against them. Since the storm cannot talk, how can we know? I would have personally led a delegation to the storm community to verify where they come from, the times they do, and perhaps ask for conditions of peace. Who else can give us this information than the owner of storms?

It is difficult for some brethren to believe that storms are from God. When you see this differently, it is clear that you have failed. However, every believer thinks that God created all times. I could just imagine that there is a time for me to definitely have some troubles. It's unbelievable! What if I do everything well and nicely, would there still be troubles? Yes! What if I try to please every man and mind my own business? Yes! What if I try to do everything the bible says and try to please God in all times, would I be free from trouble? No! To this last one, I will add something more:

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord ***blameless.***

*And **they had no child**, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. Luke 1:5-7KJV*

Trouble means: a problem, worry, difficulty, etc. or a situation causing any of these.

These were brethren. They were righteous and devoted. But they had no child. That was a trouble. When I considered the situation closely, I thought they deserved all God's blessings. In fact if there was anybody that we could vote *'immunity'* to troubles, they are just qualified. Like we saw in the scripture above, they were also priests. So I can imagine that somehow someone may come to be prayed for and the prayer point would be, 'Lord I need a child'. The man of God, Zachariah would pray and God would answer. Yet they had no child to call their own which is the desire of most people.

We were not told how these brethren handled all the naming ceremonies that came to them. And all the hurts that would come to them as well-meaning sympathizers would come with all manner of what would look like encouragements. These continued until the situation began to appear hopeless. The scripture revealed that *they were well stricken in age.*

But we don't know how long they lasted in this mess before the Father came to their rescue.

My own mother had experienced a part of this as she trusted God for seven years after marriage before she had a baby. She told me about the songs of mockery from her mates and other ill treatments. Surely the experience was not a pleasant one for her. But I can say that Mr. Zachariah had a rather prolonged trouble. We are only trying to show that the believer can also have troubles. Someone may say that it is because the Christ had not gone to the cross. Then I have another story:

And to keep me from being puffed up and too much elated by the exceeding greatness (preeminence) of these revelations, there was given me a thorn (a splinter) in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to rack and buffet and harass me, to keep me from being excessively exalted.

Three times I called upon the Lord and besought [Him] about this and begged that it might depart from me;

But He said to me, My grace (My favor and loving-kindness and mercy) is enough for you [sufficient against danger and enables you to bear the trouble manfully]; for My strength and power are made effective in [your] weakness... 2 Cor. 12:7-9a (AMP)

This is the account of the Apostle Paul. Bible scholars say that he had ailment as at that time. But Paul describing the situation called it a '*messenger from Satan', 'a thorn in the flesh'.* And in analyzing the effect of these situations he said that he was '*racked, buffeted and harassed'.* We can conclude that He had big time trouble. What else could a disciple who had trouble do than to pray?

I supposed when he noticed that this matter would not just go, he entered into prayer. He prayed and believed but nothing happened. Then he prayed again and again. Yet that problem seemed not to go. So he went for enquiry only to discover that that problem was a necessary one.

There are necessary troubles in this journey. When He enquired of God explained to him that this problem is not built to go but to stay. It has been assigned to do some certain jobs. I have pity for those who have not been taught the art of divine enquiry. Those who don't enquire know how to do one thing perfectly—*complaining*. They would go here and there talking and talking. There is a time when counseling is not necessary. Only if we heard Him!

Paul healed the sick while he was sick. He even raised the dead at one point. He had issues that defied

prayers. Yet it did not deter him from fulfilling his ministry. What the Father considers is our purpose not our comfort. And whatever disturbs our purpose is the real problem else there is no problem at all. We *can't find purpose and comfort sitting down together in any fast food joint. The day you found purpose was the day you parted with comfort*. This is what some brethren don't realize. You can't have the two at the same time. Those who desired to have a life of comfort have denied themselves of a worthy life of impact. The thing that interests me most in that story is Paul's response:

...Therefore, I will all the more gladly glory in my weaknesses and infirmities, that the strength and power of Christ (the Messiah) may rest (yes, may pitch a tent over and dwell) upon me!

This is the response of a man that has parted with comfort. By a proper understanding he chose to focus on fulfilling his purpose than on his present feelings. When he prayed, the Lord answered that he was to be given enough energy to enable him manfully bear the trouble. That was all he needed indeed. So long as it was not going to hinder him from reaching all the heights determined by the creator for him, then it's okay. What do you value most? Is it the purpose or the problem; the commission or the comfort? You must be

clear on this. Being certain as what is more important to you, will place you 90% up front on the path of victory or defeat. And if his inmost desire aligns with God's ultimate mandate, then you can beat your chest and shout victory!

There are different kinds of trouble ranging from financial troubles to marital, health, education, disappointments etc. You can mention them. The list is endless. One unique thing about troubles is that they differ per individual and nation. What could be a trouble to one may not be a trouble to the other. But the fact remains that troubles generally are discomforts.

One amazing thing about troubles is that there are benefits attached to them. This may be difficult to accept but it is the truth. Paul was going to reveal that to us when he said:

*But to **keep me from being puffed up** with pride because of the many wonderful things I saw, I was given a painful physical ailment, which acts as Satan's messenger to beat me and **keep me from being proud**.(GNB)*

We could see that these issues are on assignment. They are there to keep the man of God spiritually fit. Their

aim is to cut him to shape because he must be healthy enough to compete his assignment. So the Lord permitted the delegation from hell to meet with him. We must understand that the Lord does not do evil to his children, but he permits it at times. Whenever it was time to do something negative, He would refer the job to the department of Satan for proper execution.

Perhaps you have thought of this before. Now you have known—no problem is without aim. Every problem *that the Lord permits* is there to solve or prevent a certain problem in our lives. We also know that sometimes due to ignorance the devil seeks to molest and oppress children of God. He could afflict some with disease and all that. But if we pray about it, it leaves. However, we must understand that God permits troubles to come our way and when they do, it is for a purpose:

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.

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. Rom 8:28-30KJV

I will like us to read that scripture carefully so we find the links between the verses. The first thing we notice is that *'all things'* not some things, everything works together for our good. One version puts it: 'and we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans'. Now it doesn't matter what comes our way it is for something good. Now the question is what good? I have asked this question several times in my journey with the Lord especially when things were not going the way I had planned. The good doesn't usually appear immediately. It may even take years for it to appear. But if the Lord says it is for good, we can bet our lives on it.

Several persons can readily agree that some things work for our good. But they may not quickly agree that it includes everything. Someone may quickly interrupt, 'how does losing my job and having to run into all manner of debts be for my good?' It is even funnier to think about the death of a loved one as working for my good. I have to wait for five years after

high school before getting into the university. And the Lord says it is for my good. The carnal cannot fathom this one.

And when Paul wanted to approach the matter he started by saying, 'and we know'. There is a knowledge that is beyond human calculations. It is that kind Brother Hagin would call 'advanced knowledge'. It is a knowledge beyond the scope of man. If I must say, I would say that the problem the church is having along this line is that of lack of knowledge. And if you are still struggling like me with this understanding, then I diagnose you of knowledge issue. But not to worry, it has a cure.

As I considered this matter this morning, I could see the answer to my question of years stirring at me from the Holy Scriptures.

The next verse started with a 'for'. It provided us with a clue to what God has in mind for allowing problems. Maybe you have to go through the second verse again. He said *it is*

For [**Because**] *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.* ***(Emphasis added)***

God's desire is that we become like His son. Now it doesn't matter who we are now but without this change (into the likeness of His son) we can't do anything that is heavenly acceptable. And to be conformed to His son takes a whole lot of process. It means that we need to be hammered into shape. Let us assume that every human born into the earth is out of shape with Jesus. So there is need for shaping. It is like sculpturing. Troubles are tools for this noble work.

Troubles comes our way and hit us front and back. The more we yield to the ***making*** the better for us. Some of us have a way of avoiding troubles. We do all we can in order to escape the very things that will make us become like Him. We need to be like Him because it is only Him that can fulfill purpose. God had planned this beforehand. He would not relent at it. As long as you are among those who love God and are the called according to His purpose you must have to *conform*. **We agree that we all need to be made but we all aren't ready for the process.**

Paul needed to be in shape and be like *the Son* in term of his ego so the messenger was sent to him. There are times when God would want to teach something about finances and there is no other way than to let us go broke for sometimes. Joseph would not be the man he

ought to be if he had not passed through all he passed through. Perhaps we would have read that he sent thousands of persons to prison and 99% were innocent. But it was not so. I believe he got several reports from sycophants but instead of acting in haste like Potiphar, he would scrutinize the matter properly. He got this understanding not while he was having his quiet time with the Lord but while he was having some trouble moment with the devil. There are some knowledge of God that can't be got in the church auditorium. It has to be gotten in the furnace of affliction. Even our Lord Jesus learnt obedience through the things He suffered.

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; Heb. 5:8KJV

Please observe this scripture and how it started. It says, 'though he was the son of God'. Now you can see that it doesn't matter who you are or who you claim to be. You might even be boasting of a very rich bible study time with the Lord. We thank God for that. But you see you might not get to learn some vital lessons from there. It may have to come practically. For the Son, I don't want to say that obedience became a matter to deal with in Him. We can't say so about Him who knew no sin. However, the scripture, in trying to drive

the point to us closely, portrayed that he learned obedience by the things he suffered. That is, those things were what the Lord used in teaching Him obedience. You might as well be passing through similar training but ignorantly refusing to take the lessons embedded therein.

Let's hear from another brother:

*And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: **knowing** that tribulation worketh patience;*

And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. Rom 5:3-5KJV

***Knowing** this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*

But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. James 1:3-4 KJV

Child of God, you need experience. Without experiences there are some messages heaven cannot send you to deliver. And experience is birthed by tribulations. Series of troubles make mature believers. I am still surprised to notice that the Love of God by the Holy Spirit is shed abroad in our heart through

troubles. It's amazing! Can you see what I'm seeing? *Understanding comes only as we resort to the word of God.*

There is one more reason why troubles are permitted our way as we drew from Rom. 8:29

Moreover *whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified*

The word 'moreover' for me is a strong word for our consideration. It shows quickly that this verse is not separate from the 'all things working together for our good'. It only provided further information about the ongoing. We could paraphrase it thus: he wants us to be conformed to the image of his son. In addition to that fact is the reason that he had planned to call us into His service long before we were formed. He didn't get to us by mistake. It has been His entire plan from the beginning.

Moreover, when He calls a man, He justifies him. It is as if to say that He has to have something to answer any man who rises up to question why He has placed me in His vineyard. And He does this by 'squeezing' all His men. My friend I want to shock you, '***check around you, both from the scriptures and in the***

contemporary, can you find a man who did great things for the Lord and did not have troubles?' I bet you found none. In fact the more they would do for the Lord the more they would have to suffer for Him. The Lord only seeks to justify Himself. There are no exceptions. Even for our Lord Jesus, the scripture has this to say:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make ***the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*** *Heb 2:9-10 KJV*

There was no other way for Him to have been nominated apart from suffering. His appointment as our captain was not political. Little wonder why it took thirty years for heaven to officially announce Him as a Son. One could expect that the next as He just went to carpentry shop and a woman abuses Him heaven should intervene immediately. But it is not so. He had to pass through a process. The Lord must be justified. There was no way He could lead us if He has not overcome all the familiar things that affects us today.

The scriptures reveal that He was tempted in every way yet without sin. He passed the test. Now He is our captain.

Do you also want to be a captain? Do you want heaven to give you a voice? Are you ready to make impact on earth? Then you have to re-turn your understanding towards troubles. One of the goodness of troubles as they come is that they are there to justify your appointment. It is rare to find a man solving a problem himself had not faced and conquered. What would be your attitude from now onwards?

I think this is the knowledge that produces the right response. Ponder on these things and don't squirm again.

Chapter Eight

PERIL AMONG FALSE BRETHREN

Not all men have faith. Assumption is the most dangerous problem of the missionary on the field. It is possible to become used to the company of brethren to the point that you begin to feel that all men are brethren. This phenomenon happens more among older brethren. I call it *'the-brethren- syndrome'*. It says that as long as the person is coming around and doing few things that look like brethren things, he is one of us.

Early in our walk with the Lord, we were taught to test all spirits and we did. We were very careful before we extend the hand of fellowship to another. We simply calculated before we leaped. But as we journeyed, we tend to become so busy that we sometimes are not careful with those things that once mattered to us. We begin to take for granted the biddings of the Holy Spirit. The major struggle here is not outright disobedience but a problem with deciphering. From

my experience, it is usually a matter of attempting to grow into maturity.

Somehow we all want to be like Jesus. So we don't want to give our mind that space to wander into flesh. So any thought that looks like the enemy whispering we shun it immediately. Unfortunately, some of those thoughts that appear as if they are negative are not actually from the enemy but the Holy Spirit trying to warn us. For example a new brother steps into the fellowship exuding a lot of charisma and getting everybody's attention. But somehow you notice your heart is not going with the fanfare even though you are making every effort to flow along. The first reaction of a genuine disciple of Jesus is to begin to suspect his heart of envy. Many times it could be envy trying to creep in. However we must note that it is not so all the time. That could be the Spirit of God alerting you. Several of us have struggled with this kind of issue until calamity stroke.

The first issue we must settle in our heart is the fact that all men are not brethren. We have men and they are mere men. And we also have the brethren. Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost and he addressed, 'men and brethren'. We must separate this two clearly to avoid or minimize some calamities. Funny enough,

unbelievers usually enjoy *brethren* things. They would not want to believe but they would prefer to somehow through any possible means sneak into the fold.

Perhaps we should sit down again and redefine what 'brethren' mean to us in the light of the Word of God. The question in my heart that I want us to all look at critically is: ***'Who is a brother?*** Are there criteria before one is referred to as a brother in the fold? Are there things we can look out for? And lastly, we must be sure of this matter—*is it right to scrutinize another?*

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. 1 John 4:1KJV

This one is a command that we ought to obey. We can see the scriptures giving us the permission to test every spirit. Some people really feel very bad if they attempt to pause a while in order to ascertain the true position of a new brother or sister. They wonder among themselves, 'what if this man is a true child of God; see what I am doing in delaying his request'. Now let me answer you, 'until then'. Until he is confirmed, he must be taken with care; unless there is an express witnessing of the Holy Spirit.

Paul speaking to young Timothy said, 'do not lay hands hastily'. And another place he said, 'don't ordain a new comer'. I believe if we be more careful, the phrase, 'false brethren' would not exist. Actually there is no such thing as 'false brethren'. If they are false, it means that they are not brethren at all. Actually they were not even brethren in the first place. Their brothership existed only in our head. The Lord is not aware of such joke. Sometimes we had called '*Brother so and so'* while the Holy Spirit is saying, 'who said so and since when?'

We know we are going to have some issues along this journey, but we must exercise wisdom to avoid as many as we can because it is the will of God for us to make progress, even our speed.

The peril of false brethren is mostly betrayal. It manifests as what the scriptures call wolves in sheep clothing. Considering this illustration it is proper for us to examine how this works. A wolf is not a sheep in every ramification. There is no semblance between a wolf and a sheep. In fact wolves prey on sheep. Right from nursery school, sheep are taught to avoid wolves. So as soon as a sheep sees a wolf, she will quickly recognize it and head for safety. This is the manner of sheep and wolves.

Can you imagine a wolf in sheep skin? When the sheep sees it she would embrace it as one of their own. And they would even start discussing how to avoid wolves and all that. After a while, the wolf would also learn the diction of the sheep family. He might even be given a chieftaincy title for his hard work and especially his bravery towards other wolves. Now the wolf is leading the sheep. And the sheep trusting and following the wolf. It is a terrible situation. What happens when the wolf becomes hungry? I will leave that answer for you to fill in.

This is the case with the church today. We have wolves everywhere. Some are on the pulpit while others are in the pew. The infiltration of wolves into the various nooks of the church is quite alarming. Nowadays, wolves are the ones deciding the movement of the church. It looks like everything is going well until hunger strikes.

What do you call brethren who persecute and suspend other brethren for preaching the gospel? You have wondered, 'I thought these are brethren?' Sorry dear; all are not brethren. Not all who call on the name of the Lord are actually brethren. They may even perform miracles using the name of our Lord. May I say to you, that it doesn't matter! What matters is, whether their

name is in the Lamb's book of life? Those who are actually not registered with the lamb and operate according to his dictates are not and should not be called brethren. The very question in my heart now is, 'are you in the number?

The Lord knows his people

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, ***The Lord knoweth them that are his.*** *And, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*

This is the consolation for the pilgrim of the Lord. We don't need to be worried over this matter beyond normal. The Lord has taken care of His part. He knows His people. We don't need to act before the presence of the Lord for He knows. Are you among the camouflage? This is a personal question every one of us must settle as a matter of urgency. It is too risky to think that we belong to Him when in actual sense we don't. **Being sound in theology is not the same as being sound in Christ.** We must put everything aside and focus on the Lord of the church. What is He currently saying about you? Go and review your status today. Some people used to be brethren until there was this disconnection. The right word is 'rectify'. Would you go and rectify it?

God's verdict on the faithful

Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?

And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.

Mal 3:14-16 *KJV*

There is a book of remembrance. It is with the Lord. He will pull it out at the right time. Ours is to hold on to Him. When the appointed time comes, the king would not sleep until He has visited your matter. There is still a difference between those who fear God and those who do not.

The response:

When you are betrayed what do you do? Or when you were betrayed what did you do? Several brethren collapsed into depression, saying, 'how can this brother do or say such a thing'. To them it is simply

unbelievable and unbearable. The major argument is, 'if anyone would do such a thing, it should not be this sister. They take the matter personal. They get so hurt that it becomes a matter of time for them to recover. Some do not even recover after all.

I have been wondering what could be the best response for the peril. I think we need now than ever what I call shock-absorbers. We need it even because of the time we are in. The scripture has already warned us of betrayal in the last days.

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 1 Tim 4:1KJV

Brethren we must get prepared to face what the Lord wants us to face. And be ready to overcome. No mountain should be too high to climb and no valley too deep to cross. When the heart is set, other matters begin to fall into shape.

About the Author

Christian Michael is the coordinator of Young Peoples' Fellowship, a missionary body focused on young people. It is a network of young people from different denominations who are determined to take the Word of God to other young People throughout the world.

BIO

- Preacher and teacher of God's word with about 11 years of experience into part time ministry
- Worked as an assistance Pastor for 2 years
- A missionary, fully committed into impacting on the lives of young people in the Primary, secondary school and the university. (leading a team of about 500 persons spread across 3 countries namely – Nigeria, Ghana and Benin Republic)

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