

# Police Memorial Sunday

Coram Deo  
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Gracia, Soli Scriptura

Sermon Preached at

Stouffville United Church United

Rev. Captain Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

## “What Happens to Good People When Bad Things Happen?”

*Fourth in the Series: “Esther”*

*May 21, 2023*

Esther 4

The one question I have had asked of me more than any other over the last 34 years is: “Why do bad things happen to good people?” The terrible fact is that is the reality of life. Bad things happen. Good things happen to bad people, bad things happen to good people, good things happen to good people, bad things happen to bad people. That is the reality of life. The rain falls on the just and the unjust alike we are told in scripture. The terrible reality is that bad things happen. Jesus said it, “In this world you will have tribulation.” We can’t escape it in this world. It doesn’t mean we have to like it. It means, however, that because of our Lord, we have the resources to deal with it.

Perhaps a better question is “*What happens to good people when bad things happen?*” Esther and Mordachi had to face a bad situation. And yet, they believed that they were placed in the King’s palace at that time by God to bring something good out of what was bad.

When we grasp this, we are on the road to finding a measure of peace. We have a choice when life is hard. We can become bitter or better.

### I

**We become bewildered when we focus on what’s lost.** ” *When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. 2 But he went only as far as the king’s gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. 3 In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.*”

Mordecai became bewildered when we focused on what could be lost. And we all do. We all begin to lose perspective and can only see what is going wrong instead of a way through.

Life and loss are two sides of the same coin. Blake said it this way,

Joy and woe are woven fine,  
A clothing for the soul divine.  
Under every grief and pine

Runs a joy with silken twine.  
It is right it should be so;  
Man was made for joy and woe.  
And when this we rightly know,  
Through the world we safely go.

Under every grief and pine runs a joy with silken twine. I wonder, perhaps that is part of the problem--we don't get underneath it. We just want to get past it, get away from it, get beyond it. And so we say so many unhelpful things. When a child's specially loved toy is broken and his eyes are full of tears, it isn't much good saying--but we do say it--"Don't cry, it doesn't matter, it didn't cost much. You'll get over it. We'll get you another." But it does matter, and everyone who knows and loves children know that no toy really can replace one that was once loved and now lay broken.

Yes, grief is common, but to say so, is to forget that some heart is breaking. Soren Kierkegaard understood this when he said, "It requires moral courage to grieve. It requires religious courage to rejoice" Jesus had the moral courage to grieve, for He wept over Jerusalem. And to have it is to understand and acknowledge the tragic dimensions of life. Without it, we are superficial.

There is an Arab Proverb that says, "All sunshine makes a desert." The trouble free life is likely to be a shallow life. We often learn more and mature more from times of sorrow than from times when everything is going well. A familiar poem by Robert Browning Hamilton expresses this truth:

I walked a mile with Pleasure,  
she chattered all the way,  
But left me none the wiser  
For all she had to say

I walked a mile with Sorrow,  
And ne'er a word said she,  
But, oh, the things I learned from her  
When Sorrow walked with me.

As Benjamin Franklin said, "Those things that hurt, instruct."

It's not just that. When we focus only on what is lost, we fail to remember what had been gained in the life. These members of the police service, were women and men who sought to make a difference in the world right where they lived. And they did, as each member of the police force do every day. We must never forget that the freedoms we enjoy come with a price. And we must always remember that the service given continues to reap blessings upon blessings long after we are gone.

We become bewildered when we focus only on what's lost. Yet, we begin to get **better when we believe that the future is not lost.** *"12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"*

There are things that we don't want to happen but have to accept; things we don't want to know, but have to learn; and people we can't live without but have to let go. And when we do we discover the future is only lost if we give up on it.

Ludwig Van Beethoven noticed that he was losing his sense of hearing. As a composer, he worried that he could no longer create music if he becomes deaf. He tried every cure available to him but to no avail. One day, his greatest fear came true. He became totally deaf. According to the Daily Walk devotional, "Beethoven finally found the strength he needed to go on despite his great loss. To everyone's amazement, he wrote some of his grandest music after he became totally deaf. With all distractions shut out, melodies flooded in on him as fast as his pen could write them down. His deafness became a great asset."

Tennyson said it this way,

Tis not too late to seek a newer world. . .  
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;  
It may be we shall touch the happy Isles  
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.  
Though much is taken, much abides, and thou  
We are not now that strength which is the old days  
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are  
One equal-temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.

### III

It is true, we become bewildered when we focus only on what's lost and we begin to become better when we believe that the future is not lost. **And finally we are blessed when we have faith in the Lord.**

*15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."*

As Neville Talbot has said, "When you come to the bottom, it is there that you find God."

God is our refuge and strength a very present help in times of trouble." Who shall separate us from the love of God, shall tribulation our famine, nakedness or the sword. No, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither life nor death angels or principalities or powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation shall ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

With tragedy he will walk us through it, and help us get to the other side. He walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death, and we do not have to fear, because we know that he is with us. He may even, in his wisdom, turn the tragedy around and bring healing and restoration. But far more often than not, our path through tragedy is to face it, knowing that Jesus will not leave us on our own.

One of the verses that have given comfort to many people has become quite well known, but remains unbeaten for affirming this point.

"I saw a story unfolding in my mind's eye. My pen took over as I began writing it out. I saw myself walking along a beach with the Lord, and scenes from my life flashed before us. But during the most painful scenes, I noticed only one set of footprints was left in the sand. I asked the Lord where He had been when I needed him most. Then I wrote down His reply:

"My precious child, I love you and will never leave you. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

You may not recognize the name Margaret Rose Powers. She's the author of this poem, "Footprints.", and there is an interesting story behind her poem. In the summer of 1964, Margaret was 20 years old and was recovering from meningitis on the family farm in Ontario. With meningitis she was confined to bed for most of the summer. It was a difficult time for her; she had never felt so empty and afraid. One August evening she wrote in her diary, "Lord, have you left me too?" on the road to recovery, the man who was to marry her took her for a walk along the shore of Lake Erie. "The waves hissed into bubbles at our feet," she recalled. "Paul stopped suddenly and pointed back at our tracks in the sand. 'See our footprints, Margie? On the day we marry, they will become like one set, not two.'" That night, the image of footprints stayed with Margaret. She could not sleep, so she began writing in her diary those words have inspired millions. They affirm to us that Jesus will bring us through the hardest times in our lives, if we let him. I add to that this morning that our part is to admit our that life can hurt, <sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>and that we need someone to comfort us, walk with us and see us through. Jesus is that person, and he has made us a promise, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

Or as Churchill said, "If you are going through hell – keep going!!" You think about that. Amen.