



Anyone who tells you that Christians should never face tough times is ignorant of what Jesus taught, or lying. Difficult days come for us all, often without any real reason that satisfies. Today we discover the key to trusting Jesus during difficult days.

onlinenotes

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* All Scripture is from CSB (Christian Standard Bible) unless otherwise noted.

Are these tough times a judgment from God, an attack from the enemy, or the result of our fallen world?

- **Sometimes God BRINGS difficult days.** Throughout the Scriptures, God brings judgment on wickedness (e.g. Great Flood, Sodom & Gomorrah, Ananias & Sapphira's lies, God using governing authorities to punish evil - Romans 13., and the ultimate future judgment when God sends people to hell for eternity (Mt 25:41, Rev 20:11-15, 21:8).
- **Sometimes God PREVENTS difficult days.** God reveals a future famine so Christians can prepare before it happens (Acts 11:28). God sends an angel and releases Peter from prison instead of allowing him to be killed (Acts 12)..
- **Sometimes God ALLOWS difficult days.** Jesus warned His own apostles of future persecutions and even death (deacon Stephen - Acts 7:54-60; apostle James - Acts 12:1-2). Obviously, God could have prevented that. Sometimes He did, but other times He didn't.
 - God allows difficult days **as our spiritual enemies try to SHATTER our faith, but God uses this to STRENGTHEN our faith.** *Strong metal isn't developed without going through the fire to burn off the dross.*

✓ Difficult days point us to the REALITY of our DEPENDENCY on God's Presence and God's People.

THE STORY OF JOB. God brags on Job in front of **"ha sātān" (HEBREW)** - meaning "the satan" or **"the accuser/adversary"**. God allows the accuser to unleash difficult days on Job, killing his children and many of his servants, and taking away livestock. God limits him from harming Job's health..

Job's Response to Difficult Days

Job 1:20-22 LEB ²⁰ Then Job arose and tore his outer garment and shaved his head; then he fell upon the ground and he worshiped. ²¹ Then he said, "Naked I came out from my mother's womb, and naked I will return there. **Yahweh gives, and Yahweh takes. Let Yahweh's name be blessed.**" ²² In all this, Job did not sin and did not charge God with wrongdoing.

Job was HURTING which is why he **tore his** clothes and **shaved his head** (sign of mourning). Yet he still trusted God. When the accuser *IS* later allowed to take Job's health (boils all over his body), this brings tough times to his marriage.

Job 2:9-10 LEB ⁹ Then his wife said to him, "Are you still persisting in your blamelessness? Curse God and die." ¹⁰ So he said to her, "You speak like one of the foolish women speaks. Indeed, **should we receive the good from God, but not receive the evil?"** In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.

Based on the text, Job doesn't know that God has allowed Satan (the accuser) to bring all this destruction. All he knows is, God has been so good to his family for so long...and now in the midst of this incredible storm, he remembers the many years of God's goodness.

What can we learn from Job's story? Satan is not God's rival, somehow equal in power. In at least 2 biblical occasions, Satan had to get permission to harm God's people - in Job and later in the New Testament.

Luke 22:31-32 CSB ³¹ "Simon, Simon, look out. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. ³² **But I have prayed for you** that your faith may not fail. And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Just as we read in Job, **Satan** (the accuser) had **asked** (needing permission) **to sift you** (plural - meaning all disciples there) **like wheat**.

✗ The accuser approaches and asks to shake the faith of the apostles during the difficult days to come.

✓ Yet Jesus TOO has approached the Father in prayer, and asked that Simon Peter may **not fail** and will be **turned back** later to help **strengthen** the others. Jesus' disciples would face difficult days. Their faith would be shaken, but not shattered. As Jesus was laying in the tomb, they were hiding out.

After Jesus resurrected they would experience joy like they never knew, *but the difficult days would come once again.*

Jesus prays for disciples just hours before His death

John 17:14-18 ¹⁴ I have given them Your word. The world hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I am not praying that you take them out of the world but **that You protect them from the evil one.** ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

Just a little over a month from that day, they would experience incredible joy as they participated in seeing thousands turn from sin and follow Jesus. They would watch the believers become ONE - a faith family - just as Jesus had prayed (read all of Jn 17).

✗ The enemy would continue his attempt to shatter their faith, scatter their families, and shut down the gospel message. Some would be murdered, many would be beaten, imprisoned, or run out of town. Most of them would be treated poorly by others in the community.

✓ Through it all, the first followers of Jesus remembered this most important truth - ***that God's love was forever demonstrated at the CROSS.*** Their circumstances would change, but when the tough times came, they looked to the cross, because...

The CROSS always outweighs our Circumstances.

Remembering the Words of Jesus

John 16:33b You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world."

2 Timothy 3:12 In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Matthew 24:9 Then they will hand you over to be persecuted, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of My Name.

Jesus told His disciples of the difficult days that would come to them. After being arrested and released from prison by an angel, the apostles went right back to where they had been before, in the temple courts - telling everyone about Jesus. More persecution awaited them.

Acts 5:28-33 ²⁸ "Didn't we strictly order you not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." ²⁹ Peter and the apostles replied, "**We must obey God rather than people.**" ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted this man to his right hand as ruler and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him." ³³ When they heard this, **they were enraged and wanted to kill them.**

Thankfully, cooler heads prevailed - you can read all about it.

Acts 5:41-42 ⁴⁰ After they called in the apostles and had them **flogged**, they **ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus** and released them. ⁴¹ Then they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name.** ⁴² Every day in the temple, and in various homes, they continued teaching and proclaiming the good news that **Jesus is the Messiah.**

The offender being **flogged** received 39 lashes from a whip of calf hide, while tied to a post, bent over, or lying on the ground. 13 lashes targeted the front of the body and 26 lashes struck the offender's back.¹ But this would not deter them. Instead, they left, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name** (Jesus). The apostles had something else on their mind besides their current circumstances. They remembered that Jesus LOVED THEM, proven at the cross! When the difficult days Jesus had warned them about showed up, **they remembered something that WE need to remember:**

The CROSS always outweighs our Circumstances.

¹ Craig S. Keener, Acts: An Exegetical Commentary & 2: Introduction and 1:1-14:28, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012-2013), 1242.

Paul Persecuted

2 Corinthians 11:24-33 ²⁴ Five times I received the forty lashes minus one from the Jews. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the open sea. ²⁶ On frequent journeys, I faced dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, and dangers among false brothers; ²⁷ toil and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food, cold, and without clothing. ²⁸ Not to mention other things, there is the daily pressure on me: my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation [NAS "intense concern"]? ³⁰ If boasting is necessary, I will boast about my weaknesses. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is blessed forever, knows I am not lying. ³² In Damascus, a ruler under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to arrest me. ³³ So I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped from his hands.

Paul went through all this get the Gospel message to as many people as possible. Paul *knew that...*

The CROSS always outweighs our Circumstances.

When our circumstances cause us to question God's love, *the cross consistently communicates God's love for us.* It's during difficult times that we need to be reminded that ***the CROSS always outweighs our circumstances.*** THAT'S EXACTLY what the apostles remembered when difficult days came and the storms blew through.

Nothing Separates God's Love From Those Who Love God

Romans 8:31-39 ³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² **He did not even spare his own Son but offered him up for us all.** How will he not also with him grant us everything? ³³ Who can bring an accusation against God's elect? God is the one who justifies. ³⁴ Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. ³⁵ **Who can separate us from the love of Christ?** Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: *Because of you we are being put to death all day long; we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered.* ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that **neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing** will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In **GOOD TIMES** and **BAD TIMES** we are reminded that...

The CROSS always outweighs our Circumstances.

The difficult days ***drive us to seek God's Presence, God's People, and share the message of the Cross with others.***

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Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

- * Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Justin** (704-618-6144), **Christy** (673-9764), or another follower of Jesus soon!
- * Or call our **deacons & wives:** Steve & Debbie Bass (673-7952), Freddy & Joyce Howard (973-0047), Jere & Darlene Burnette (673-1888) , Fain & Linda Poppell (464-1282) , Jim & Derita Pinkard (229-834-4307), or Boss & Amelia Mulkey (673-1387).