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The Divine Design Behind Tempering

Isaiah 12,

1 You will say in that day:

“I will give thanks to you, O LORD,
for though you were angry with me,
your anger turned away,
that you might comfort me.

2 “Behold, God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid;
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation.”

3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. 4 And you will say in that day:

“Give thanks to the LORD,
call upon his name,

make known his deeds among the peoples,
proclaim that his name is exalted.

5 “Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;
let this be made known in all the earth.

6 Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

The world in which we live truly is a veil of tears. Christ said, “...in the world you have tribulation...” (John 16:33)- this is not a promise, but a statement of fact. In this life, there is going to be suffering. In fact, Paul said, “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” (Philippians 1:29) If it wasn’t bad enough that the world in which we live is fallen, get this: one of the reasons we have been saved is that we might suffer!¹

Now the suffering we undergo is vast and varied. Some of it will be on account of:

- Our own sin, 1 Peter 2:20a.
- Another’s sin, Jonah 1:10.
- The state of sin and misery into which we have been born, Matthew 6:34.

Yet it is God’s plan to use ALL OF IT for His glory and our good. Recall the words of Paul?

Romans 8:28, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.”

This is not an idle promise, but a glorious reality! Yet, what is meant by “good”? Isaiah 12 partially answers this question. After describing the struggles that soon would come upon his generation together with the promises of God- Immanuel and the Rod of Jesse (Isaiah. 7-11) — Isaiah transitions into a discussion of the future and so the intended end that God has when it comes to suffering.

Isaiah 11:10a, “Then it will come about in that day that the nations will resort to the root of Jesse...”-

What day? The day when God brings trial to an end.

Isaiah 11:11a, “Then it will happen on that day that the Lord will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people...”-

The trial is over and God’s people now are right where God wants them.

Isaiah 11:16-12:1a, “And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of His people who will be left, just as there was for Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt. Then you will say on that day...”

In anticipation of this glorious time of deliverance, Isaiah penned a hymn of praise in chapter 12 which constitutes nothing less than *the song of the redeemed proclaimed after trial!* In other words, this is where Isaiah says the child of God will be at the end of trial! And hence, this is The divine design behind all

tempering in the life a child of God.

Individual Praise on account of Comfort Given

Isaiah 12:1, “Then you [this is singular, talking about the individual Christian] will say on that day, “I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord; for although Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou dost comfort me.”

A doxology/praise is behind all that God is doing in our lives. He saved us for His glory, but we are not automatons. Accordingly, it is God’s plan to mold and shape us through trial that in the end we might individually thank Him and so praise Him. And yet there is more to this passage than just praise. Notice some of the particulars.

“I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord; for although Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away.” From this we conclude that our imperfection can and at times does evoke a fatherly displeasure in God.

- William Cowper described it as² “...a frowning providence.”
- Isaiah described it as “God hiding his face from the house of Jacob” (Isaiah 8:17).

God’s anger is not that of an offended Deity endeavoring to execute justice on a sinful people. Rather, this is the response of love that must be given to the child in rebellion or imperfection.

Hebrews 12:7-8, “It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.”

In the lives of Isaiah’s contemporaries, this took the form of the trial of national turmoil as the Assyrians devoured the Northern Kingdom. This would be a devouring which would result in great devastation for those living in the Southern Kingdom. For some this was the just-wrath of God on account of covenant rebellion whereby God deigned to cut off a people who longer were God’s people- recall the designation God gave to Israel, “Lo-Ammi” (Hosea 1:9)! From this perspective, the “anger” referenced here is divine wrath. For others —the remnant — this was but the tempering hand of the Lord whereby the genuine child of God suffered alongside the wicked (Isaiah 8:9ff)!

And yet here we read that there is a terminus point for all affliction and sorrow in the life of the believer. The end (telos) of our redemption is not suffering, BUT adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. And that is exactly where God deigns to bring each of His children.

“Then you will say in that day, “I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord; for although Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away.” Do you see it? The tension of affliction is relieved by praise! On what basis?

“And Thou dost comfort me.” נִחַם (nichum); the word for “comfort” is onomatopoeic, the definition is as the sound: נִחַם (nichum)! It is the sound that is made when severe pain is met with relief! The word literally means “to breathe deeply,” and so denotes the physical display of one’s feelings following the

resolution of a trial. It is used in the Bible in reference to two different responses: an expression denoting repentance or comfort. Here the focus is on “comfort” and so is translated that way in all the major translations.

So why is it that we praise God in response to trial? Because in and through it He draws by our side (remember He is “with us”), wipes our brow, and whispers the sweet promise, *“Do not be burdened; it is well! I am with you! Be not afraid!”*

Isaiah 43:1b-3a, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

Don’t miss it! This is where God intends to bring each of us as we grow in the grace of God: comfort... peace... joy in the Lord... and so praise!³

Individual Trust in the Lord

Isaiah 12:2, “Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.”

This is quite a statement. Notice how it begins with the word “behold.” As Hebrew did not have punctuation marks, we might call this a “punctuation word” for it is written to wake the reader up and alert him to the fact that what is about to be stated is truly amazing! *“Behold, you are never going to believe this... And what is that?”*

“God is my salvation.” Wait a minute, GOD is your salvation?! GOD is that upon which you have placed your hope and trust not just for eternity, but in your day to day living! It is not...

- Your own efforts?
- The resources of man?
- The comfort and security of a large army?
- Earthly alliances?
- Assyria?
- A king, president, leader, or parent?

Isaiah here says, *“NO! My trust is in God alone and therefore...”*

“I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and song.” It is important that you and I understand that when Isaiah says that “The Lord is his trust” he is talking about the Lord of Isaiah 6.

- Transcendent.
- Holy.
- Awesome.
- Great in His majesty.

- Ruling over all the earth!

Before whom the nations are as “a drop from a bucket” (Isaiah 40:15). This was Isaiah’s trust. This was his strength. This was his song, moment by moment, day after day as long as we live. And so it is with us, but we rarely live there! And that is why God ordains trial and difficulty in this life: to bring His children to this confession. Notice how the verse ends, reaffirming the point: “He has become my salvation.”

Salvation in the Bible involves far more than just deliverance from temporal difficulty. It includes this, and a whole lot more. Salvation involves the well-being of the image bearer and so encompasses the physical, spiritual, and emotional aspects of our being. These areas of his life were gauged and so influenced by his trust in God!

Now don’t miss it! It is to this conviction/this life that God deigns to bring each of us as He tempers and molds us. A third goal that God has for us as His children is fellowship.

Fellowship

Isaiah 12:3, “Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation.”

This is a most incredible statement. In fact it clearly is the most important one in this passage. Notice that Isaiah 12 was written in the form of a Chiasm⁴ with Isaiah 12:3 receiving the emphasis.

- A: Individual Praise on account of Comfort Given, v. 1.
- B: Individual Trust in the Lord, v. 2.
- C: Fellowship, v. 3.
- B¹: A Passion for Corporate Trust in the Lord, v. 4.
- A¹: Corporate Praise on account of God’s Character, vv. 5-6.

From this we CONCLUDE that ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT REASONS FOR WHY THE LORD BRINGS TRIAL IN THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN IS SO THAT WE MIGHT ENJOY A DEEP, ABIDING FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD! It is this that receives the emphasis.

“Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation.”

The idea is a rich, deep, abiding in and so fellowshiping with Christ. In fact notice, this is not the only time we read of a “drawing water from the springs/river of salvation.” The concept is found throughout Scripture. Ezekiel describes a vision he saw of a spring emanating from the temple watering the arid regions south and east of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 47:1-2, “Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar. And he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate by way of *the gate* that faces east. And behold, water was trickling from the south side.”

Psalm 46:4, “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High.”

John referenced it in Revelation 22.

Revelation 22:1, “And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

This reference would have meant much to a people living in the dry and arid land of Palestine (at least southern Palestine). A river of water truly would mean a river of life. And yet we know that “the river” referenced here and throughout the Bible is nothing less than salvation and so Christ Himself. Christ speaking to the Samaritan woman put it this way:

John 4:13-14, “Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.’”

In its most essential form, the “River of Life” is one and the same as salvation. And yet, as salvation is more than just the forgiveness of sins, the “river of life” can be taken to mean much more.

John 7:38-39, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

In this text, “river of life” is used in reference to the Spirit of God and the multifaceted gifts of comfort, refreshment, and nourishment which He gives to the child of God as the child of God fellowships with the Lord in His word! It is this that was and is the focus of God in the Christian’s maturation and so the Christian’s suffering. God deigns to bring us to a deeper and more abundant place of fellowshiping with Him whereby we are refreshed, nourished, and matured. Think of it:

- If an eternal love relationship is the essence of salvation (cf. John 17:3), then the placing of the enjoying of this relationship as the goal of God’s sanctifying work of the believer in trial makes perfect sense.
- And such is God’s will for all in Christ in life and death: enabling us to glorify Him (Is. 12:1-2) and enjoying Him (Isaiah 12:3)!

And yet would you notice that the tense of the main verb in this passage has shifted from a singular to a plural, “Therefore you [2nd person plural indicating that the fellowship we enjoy here is not merely to be individual, but also communal!!!] will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation.” You must see that the time you spend with the Lord on your own must be shared with the body in the context of fellowship. That is one of God’s aims as it relates to our growth in grace as well as trial: enjoying Christ together as a people! And yet there is more. Notice...

A Passion for Corporate Trust in the Lord

Isaiah 12:4, “And in that day you will say, “Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name [that is, rely upon

His character]. Make known His deeds among the peoples; make *them* remember that His name is exalted.”

As we just saw, this corresponds to Isaiah 12:2 and the passion for us to trust the Lord. Yet here it has a larger audience in mind than just you or me. Notice what Isaiah here says: “in the day of restoration when trial gives way to submission and so fellowshiping with God.”

- We are going to be so moved that we will want others to come to this place in their relationship with Him: trusting the Lord and so calling on His character.
- As such we will endeavor to make God’s deeds known to others. And yet we won’t rest even here!
- Our passion won’t be satisfied until all people in all places are reminded and so know that God’s name is exalted!

From this we see two very important points. The first is the longing for others to have what we have in our walks with Christ: a deep, abiding relationship with the Lord. The second is the exaltation of God in the hearts and minds of all peoples. This is the intended end of every trial!

Remember when David gave up the life of trust, moved to the land of Philistia and resorted to the life of a crazy man for protection?

1 Samuel 21:10-15, “Then David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath [who is the “Abimelech” of Psalm 34- Abimelech being a Philistine title akin to “Pharaoh”]. But the servants of Achish said to him, ‘Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of this one as they danced, saying, “Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands”?’ And David took these words to heart, and greatly feared Achish king of Gath. So he disguised his sanity before them, and acted insanely in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, ‘Behold, you see the man behaving as a madman. Why do you bring him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence? Shall this one come into my house?’”

Now to David’s utter surprise, God deigned to protect this man-fearing king! And when deliverance came, David stood amazed.

- *Why hadn’t he trusted the Lord?*
- *God is so kind and gracious, an ever present help in time of need!*
- *Truly from this time forth and forever he must trust the Lord!*

And yet, this wasn’t enough. In his praise and exalting in God David longed for others to know the Lord as did he. And so he wrote this:

Psalm 34:6-8, “This poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them. O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!”

It is to this place that God deigns to bring all His children... the longing for others to know the greatness, glory, and goodness of God! You must see that this is a longing that goes beyond evangelism, but the

imparting of Christ and a mature relationship with Him to another person.

Corporate Praise on account of God's Character

Isaiah 12:5-6, "Praise the Lord in song, for He has done excellent things; let this be known throughout the earth. Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

This passage may sound like "more of the same," yet it is not. Notice two important points:

First, the wording here alludes to the Song of Miriam which she sang after God's people crossed the Red Sea. To show you this, first let me share with you what I have thus far passed over in our discussion of this passage: When Isaiah penned Isaiah 12 clearly he had the Exodus in mind.

Isaiah 11:16, "And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of His people who will be left, just as there was for Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt. 12:1 Then you will say on that day..."

Clearly the Exodus as a pattern is in mind here! Furthermore recall that following the Exodus Moses brought God's people to Marah where there was water, but it was bitter (Exodus 15, 25-27). So the Lord had him toss a tree into the water and it became a spring of life- which is that which is behind.

Isaiah 12:3, "Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation."

Note also that the wording of Isaiah 12:4 is a direct quote of Psalm 105 in which the Exodus is referenced as the basis for praise.

Psalm 105:1, "Oh give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples."

There is no question that behind his encouragement here, Isaiah had the Exodus in mind- which is quite significant! When the Christian goes through trial, they enter into a type of Egypt, are harassed, and then are delivered by the great and mighty power of God! With this note, the gender of Isaiah 12:6 shifts from the masculine to the feminine. That is odd, unless something or someone is in mind which clearly is the case here. When God's people crossed the Red Sea, who was it that led the nation in song? Miriam- the sister of Moses!

Exodus 15:21, "And Miriam answered them, 'Sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted...'"

With this, notice what Isaiah says.

Isaiah 12:6, "Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

The implication is that on account of the saving work of God, we are delivered from trial and difficulty that we might praise, honor, and so glorify God recall that this ultimately is what was behind the Exodus.

Exodus 7:16a, "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, 'Let My people go, that they may [worship] Me in the wilderness...'"

Secondly notice that the inspiration for the adoration and praise here is NOT on account of having been personally moved, BUT on account of the character of God!

"Praise the Lord in song, for He has done excellent things; let this be known throughout the earth. Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel!"

This is an important element. Mysticism/Baalism was alive and well in Isaiah's day as in our own. According to that religion, worship/adoration of a deity was inspired by how one felt. Yet such is not the case in the worship and service of God. Truly it is NOT our emotion that is to inspire praise, BUT the character of God. Alec Motyer commented here:

...song is called for not as an expression of inner elation but as a response to the works of the Lord. It arises not from a stirring up of emotion but from bending the mind to recall, ponder and understand his majestic deeds (Luke 24:32). (Motyer, 1993, p. 124)

Think of it in these terms. It's Mother's Day and you are ill. You spent the night throwing up, and today you are not much better. Yet you appreciate all that your mom has done for you so you call her and tell her so. Yet there is no elation when you say, "I love you, mom!" So do you mean it?

Must there be a sense of elation for the expression of appreciation to be genuine? The answer obviously is, "NO!" In fact, we would observe in a healthy relationship between two people, there rarely is elation when appreciation is expressed. Isaiah's generation needed to hear this! That which must inspire their worship was NOT their being personally moved, BUT a proper response to the greatness of God. It was this that was to move the corporate people of God as they grew in their walks with Christ. It is to this that God is bringing each of us in our maturation in grace: the ability to give praise to God NOT because of what you have been given, BUT because of who He is! This truly is the "good" for which God is working in and through all things!

End Notes

¹ This obviously with a view toward our growth in grace (cf. Heb. 12:11).

² Red Trinity Hymnal #128, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way"

³ Don't miss the implication! So many of us are deluded into thinking that it is God's plan for us in this life to enjoy ease of days. That is why we get angry when things don't go our way. Yet I assure you, ease of days is not God's plan for us in this state. Rather from Is. 12 we learn that it is God's plan in this life for Himself to be a balm of peace and comfort to the wounded soul unto the praise of the glory of His grace. Again, recall the intended end of the suffering of Gomer: it wasn't "so that she would suffer!" Rather it was so that she would cling to God, "Then she will say, 'I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now!'" (Hos. 2:7) Accordingly, let us place this as our chief goal in life: to come to the place where Christ Himself is our comfort and joy.

⁴ Again when the Bible was written, Hebrew and Greek did not have punctuation marks. Neither was there the ability to bold a line or write in italics. And so to emphasize a point, the writer utilized such things as word choice, placement, repetition, or sentence structure. For example, when Paul wanted to emphasize something, he often times place it in what we call, "The Emphatic Position." That means he placed whatever he wanted to emphasize first in the sentence (e.g., Eph. 2:4, "But God..."). Or when

Christ wanted to emphasize a truth, often times He'd say, "Truly, truly I say to you..." (e.g., Jn. 5:24). Another way emphasis could be indicated was through the use of a literary tool we call a Chiasm- a name which comes from the Greek letter Chi (X). If you look at the first half of the letter from the side, you will note that it looks like a sideways V. Right? It was this pattern which scholars often times observed in Hebrew poetry or prose. By labeling the lines of a passage with A, B, C and those lines which appear to be a repetition as A1, B1, and C1, they observed a pattern which served to emphasize a point. Consider the example I have used many times to illustrate the point...

A: God is great!
B : God takes care of the earth.
C: Let us praise Him!
B1: God oversees everything that exists.
A1: Awesome is His name!

The clear focus and so the emphasis of this poem is C- the praise and so the worship of God. If we came upon a passage like this we would conclude that the author wanted to emphasize the fact that God ought to be praised!

Sources Cited

Motyer, J. A. (1993). *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.

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About the Preacher

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