

Seeing God in our Trials

You will have been aware The Council of Elders of the United Church of God announced on Tuesday 20th January that David Hulme will no longer serve as President. Reactions range across the broad spectrum. Some react with anger and hostility. Some with jubilation.

One factor that is very common is a desire to know all of the factors. We live in an information age. People then want to weigh up the information so they can know whether the decision was right, wrong or indifferent. I could tell you a lot of facts. But in reality all I can tell you is my side of the story.

Prov 18: 17 He that is first in the matter seems right.

It is pointless for me to pursue the path of declaring all of the factors.

Prov 10: 19 In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.

We can talk so much about things - but he that refrains his lips is wise. There are circumstances in which we can talk too much and we show our lack of wisdom and righteousness by speaking too much. I'd like to present to you that there is a more profitable aspect we can pursue - one that is easy to overlook today.

Someone was speaking to me about the Unity Statement that was produced in November. He said "The only reason you produced that was because there were problems" - and then demanded to know what the problems were. The 20th century of the Church is the only era that has had access to the amount of information we have. James would have been dead and buried for many months before some got to know about it! We live in a unique age - a day of information and a day of information overload Data fog. We also live in a day of dis-information. People speculate on anything. The element we often overlook is "Where is God in this situation?"

So much of what happens is outside our comprehension - because God has the ultimate hand and God allows things to happen for a greater purpose. Rather than "What is all the information?", we should be asking: "What are the lessons God is seeking for us to learn as a result of these things?" -That is the most fundamental lesson that is overlooked.

John 15: 1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower.

2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: (God is concerned about the production of fruit. If something is not producing fruit God cuts it off)...and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

At times you wonder what is happening. Is something being pruned because it's not producing fruit - or because it is producing fruit and God wants more fruit? I am a close friend of David Hulme. From what I have seen in his life, without question God has produced Godly fruit through David. In that case, maybe God is doing some pruning so that David can produce even more fruit.

3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

If attached to the vine we can accomplish what Christ wants. There is pain in pruning. The stem thickens up. Change comes about so it can be even more productive than it has been in the past. It become something of substance that can support even a greater amount of Godly fruit.

6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples

God is concerned about us yielding *much* fruit - not a little sporadic fruit. God wants that fruit to His glory - not ours. David has, in my mind, been producing fruit. Maybe the Eternal has in mind a way in which He can produce even more fruit. The lesson may not be so much for David than for others of us. I have spoken to you about God trying the heart so he can know us.

Gen 22: 12 ... now I know that thou (Abraham) fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

We know that the word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing the thoughts and intents of the heart so God can know what is there. God wants to see what there is in our hearts. A circumstance such as this can be a process whereby God can try all of us. I've commented in the past about being in the Council. I believe God wanted to know something about the 12 people - how we would respond with certain responsibility and certain power / control within the Church. How do we as a group of 12 respond in such a situation?

There were various men who when Herbert W Armstrong died, wanted his position because they sought the power. They didn't see the wisdom and vision he had to be able to lead God's people. They lusted after the position for the most carnal of reasons rather than for a Godly reason - the concept of serving humanity was not part of it. This was a very different mentality to that which Mr Armstrong exercised. Certainly Mr Armstrong had a lot of power. We respected him in a way in which we have not respected any other individual.

1 Cor 3 - this relates to everybody in the church - one who has been baptised the longest in the church to the most recently baptised. Paul is talking about the role of the ministry and states "God gives the increase". Paul said it was not his responsibility in the final analysis. Paul said he was merely a servant of God.

9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

We are God's servants working together. The people had been divided - some were "of Paul" and some were "of Apollos". We are all "of Christ" actually - but we do allow humans to come between us and Christ from time to time. We're not a High Priest - we're God's servants, working together. God's field. God's building. We collectively are part of the Temple of God.

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

We each have a responsibility personally to build on that foundation. We have to be careful how we build because:

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

We all have the same foundation to build upon - the same absolutes. I think of Ghana and Nigeria - the foundations can have all sorts of shapes and levels. We have a sure foundation upon which we are anchored and built - Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

Mr Armstrong, in 1979, was speaking to the ministry in Tucson saying "This is nothing compared with what I've been through". We said "What's happening?" He said "This is nothing - just something that is passing." So many times he had been through the fire whereby God had tried the work that had been produced in his life.

We all want to back away from fiery trials. Yet it seems it's part of the God ordained process whereby we can be brought to glory - having our work tested. It can be a test on one individual - or numerous individuals. I wouldn't be surprised if this isn't a test on numerous individuals. The work of each builder will become visible. The fire will test what sort of work each has done.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

We can build with different commodities - gold, silver, precious stones. Put those through the fire and they are enhanced, purified. They become better. More valuable. They become of greater value to God. We can produce works in our lives that God can improve upon - so there is even more to the honour and glory of God's name.

On the other hand what's produced may be characterised by wood hay and straw. What happens if you build on those? They become a heap of ash - charred remains. They are of no benefit. The energy that is locked up inside becomes released and it becomes something good for the garden at best.

God does these things so we can see in our lives what it is we have been producing.

16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest (obvious): for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

In Ghana they were building a Church building. Concrete pillars filled in with blocks. They had a small press to make the blocks, mixing soil and cement. The end result was a brick which was left out in the sun 3 days to dry. In reality it won't have the durability of a brick which has been fired in a kiln - or a concrete block which has been made with cement and gravel.

God wants our works to be manifest to see whether they really are of God. The First Day of Unleavened Bread I kept as a Pastor in Rhodesia, the price of gold had just gone through the roof (1973). There were a lot of old mine workings in Rhodesia that suddenly became valuable. One member was involved in extracting the gold from the lead filings. It was grey! Obviously that gold had to go through a lot more refining processes than they had in the mine. The level of purity would be assayed, refined and refined. Thus the value would be increased. The rubbish was destroyed.

God wants to get us focused on His Work and His Plan. In reality since the United Church of God started, we've had difficulties because of two competing visions for the Church.

1 Cor 11: 18 For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.

19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

If Paul were around today he would say the same thing about us without hesitation. We do have competing visions of what the church should be like and what the church should be doing. Problems exist in the church so that those who God is really working with can be made manifest.

“Approved” - translated from Greek “dokimus” meaning “acceptable” - a word that was used particularly of coinage and money. One commentator states “In the ancient world there was no banking system and no paper money - all money was made from metal” When the coins were cooled, the rough edges were smoothed off. Look at coins in 1st century - all the coins were irregular. Their value was only known by being weighed. The coins were comparatively soft and many people shaved them closely. In one century more than 80 laws were passed in Athens to stop this practice. It was a great way of giving less for change. Some money changers were men of integrity who would accept no counterfeit - men of honour - they were called “Dokums” - meaning “approved”. Paul said God allows things to happen so that those approved can be made manifest. “I hear there are divisions and to some extent I believe it ... so it will become clear among you who are genuine.”

In the Hall of Administration prior to 1979 - a student was sitting there lamenting all the church problems: You see, God shakes the tree to see who really is attached - to see who is genuinely attached to the vine. A part of purging is to see who is really genuine in their relationship with God. In 1979 Mr Armstrong made that comment that those events were nothing to what he and Loma had had to face. Events like this help us see whether we are being Godly or not.

Eph 5: 13 But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

Paul talking about light - how God reveals our actions by light. God's Word is the light. In God's Church there is a desire to see a strong work done - a message given to the world. I see another element which says "We want to have some of this for ourselves". Which one is the attitude which God wants to have?

Hag 1: 4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?

God hasn't called us to a life of comfort and ease. Bouncing around pot holed roads at the frontier of the church. Helping people understand God's way. Not a life of comfort. All things that are approved will be made manifest by light. Light is a revealer.

4 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

What is the will of God? Going through the history of church it has been a change of personnel. The apostles were martyred. Stephen was martyred. God used that to the honour and glory of His name. We were forced beyond Jerusalem to go the world in a greater way. How did they feel when James was beheaded? Or when John died as a very elderly man? The last remaining apostle departing from the scene. It would have been a very traumatic time. There was so much apostasy swirling around the place. There was one person that John wouldn't even share a bathhouse with! John - the apostle of love. But when it came to his association with men of sin he would have “no truck” with them. He wouldn't inhabit what we would call a Turkish bath today with them. The church saw that confusion around them and John being a bulwark against that.

Another subject I've spoken to you about is Joseph. (1973 Guildford) Joseph means “fruitful”. How fruitful would he have been if he'd stayed in Canaan with his father? He went to Egypt and helped save the lives of most of the known world. Here is a super-smart brat of a brother who was self righteous and doesn't know how to bite his tongue. The end result is that the weakest in the family bears the brunt of the problem. Joseph was sold into a slave into Egypt. Who won? God did God had a greater purpose in mind! God wanted

Joseph to be more fruitful than he could ever be in the midst of his brothers. God gave him 13 years of turmoil before things started to look good. He was in Potiphar's house for a short while - and then in prison. He didn't come out of prison until he was 30.

In terms of John 15 Joseph remained linked to The Vine. He may have been pruned severely - yet God was doing it for an even greater purpose - so he could bring forth more fruit. (And his brothers learned a lot as well.) Because Joseph remained linked to the vine and didn't allow himself to become bitter and turned off, God used him and he became second to the jailer who put him in charge of everything. God eventually used him to interpret the visions of Pharaoh and he became second only to Pharaoh. He had the chance of saving people's lives.

It's an interesting example for us to consider. We all face these ups and downs. Ultimately speaking we don't know what God's ultimate purpose is for us in regards to where He wants to place us in His kingdom. One of the most beautiful verses in the account of Joseph is where he reveals himself to his brothers. To see the change in the brothers' lives as a result of what God allowed Joseph to go through. It wasn't only for Joseph's benefit - but also the brothers' benefit Notice Judah's change: He had been a callous unfeeling individual who wanted to sell Joseph for a profit - an illicit - illegal gain. He saw the anguish of his father and the demands that were being placed on the family - demands that even Joseph was placing on the family - (requiring Benjamin to be brought to Egypt) Judah said "Take my life if anything happens to Benjamin." What a change in his life. It had to be this way for even Judah to start to have the milk of human compassion.

Gen 43: 9 I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever:

He put his life before his father. What a change in a man who was only concerned with what he could do illicitly to now be prepared to put his life on the line.

Gen 44: 18 Then Judah came near unto him, and said, Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh.

19 My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a brother?

20 And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him.

21 And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him.

22 And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his father would die.

23 And thou saidst unto thy servants, Except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more.

24 And it came to pass when we came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord.

25 And our father said, Go again, and buy us a little food.

26 And we said, We cannot go down: if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down: for we may not see the man's face, except our youngest brother be with us.

27 And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons:

28 And the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces; and I saw him not since:

29 And if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

30 Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life;

31 It shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave.

32 For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever.

33 Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren.

34 For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father.

What a transformation in Judah! On this repentance on Judah's part, even if only physical, could Joseph but disclose himself to his brothers.

Gen 45: 3 And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.

Imagine the silence. They were already awe-struck. They would have had great flashbacks - they would have remembered vividly everything they'd said - and Joseph's voice ringing in their ears. They would have been transfixed - very troubled. Joseph said to his brethren

4 And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

There would have been a sense of disbelief. How could he be? Maybe they thought of the visions he had seen.

5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

I've seen people who have become corrected become bitter over the correction, That's really tragic - because until they get over the bitterness they will never move forwards. I can tell you that Mr Hulme is not bitter at all. He knows its God's battle.

Gen 50: 14 And Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.

15 And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.

They didn't understand forgiveness or repentance.

16 And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying,

17 So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.

Why did Joseph weep? Because they didn't understand that he didn't hold it against them. They were still approaching it from a carnal point of view. Joseph had a greater vision in mind than the family.

19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

Joseph was a person of vision. He saw what God was ultimately doing. Most times we easily lose sight of what God is doing. Why does God put us through trials? You could easily put it down to politics - but God is doing something greater in our lives other than what happens today and tomorrow. God is preparing us for positions of rulership in his kingdom.

What does it mean to be glorified? What does it mean for us to be able to rule this earth for 1000 years and prepare it for the 2nd resurrection? In reality it defies our imagination. What God has in store for us is so much greater than we can ever comprehend. That's why God tests us - to see what character we are building in our lives.

Matt 16: (Just prior to the Transfiguration) 21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

That's a lesson for each one of us. What do *we* savour? The works of God - or the things that are comfortable for us as a human? I personally would be very comfortable to have Mr Hulme as President - but maybe God has something else in mind. God's will has to be done - not mine.

Whenever we see some miscarriage of justice, we vent our feelings and want to turn them into action. Now is the time to be stable ... on our knees prayerfully asking for guidance. This is not the time for precipitous actions .. which may unstable. Pray for unity and clarity of direction. The ultimate lesson so often is that we want to look at all the physical circumstances and we miss out the element God sees. In reality the physical means by which changes takes place is immaterial. Something has to be allowed by God for a purpose. We should ask what is God seeking to teach us in this situation? Bearing in mind the greatness of the calling to which we have been called.

Mr Dick is still in Pasadena and he is desperate that you pray for him. He had no desire to be President. It has been thrust upon him. He asks that you pray earnestly and deeply for his guidance and protection.

... Peter Nathan

24-Jan-98

Basingstoke

[Back to Top](#)

[Back to Sermon Summary List](#)