

“BE AT PEACE”
REMOVE THE OBSTACLES SERIES #2
John 14:23-31 March 3, 2021

“World-renowned violinist Itzhak Perlman was stricken with polio as a child. As a result, he wears braces on both legs and walks with the aid of crutches. At concerts, getting on stage is no small achievement for him. He slowly crosses the stage until he reaches his chair. He lays his crutches on the floor, slowly undoes the clasps on his legs, tucks one foot back and extends the other foot forward. Then he bends down and picks up the violin, puts it under his chin, nods to the conductor, and proceeds to play.

“One fall evening in 1995, while performing at Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City, Perlman had to deal with one additional handicap. Jack Reimer, a columnist with the *Houston Chronicle*, described the scene. ‘Just as he finished the first few bars, one of the strings on his violin broke. You could hear it snap--it went off like gunfire across the room. There was no mistaking what that sound meant.’

“There was no mistaking what he had to do. People who were there said, ‘We figured he would have to get up . . . to either find another violin or find another string for this one.’

“But he didn't. Instead Perlman waited a moment, closed his eyes, and then signaled the conductor to begin again. The orchestra and he played from where he had left off. He played with passion and power.

“Of course, it is impossible to play a symphonic work with just three strings. But that night Itzhak Perlman refused to know that. You could see him modulate, change, recompose the piece in his head. At one point, it sounded like he was detuning the strings to get new sounds they had never made before.”¹

Over and over and over again we are faced with adversity and struggle. Disease strives to debilitate us, preventing us from living as well as others or keeping us from enjoying life altogether.

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2003] pg. 9)

Accidents come up suddenly that take us by storm and turn our world up-side-down. Death of loved ones flip us onto our heads with sorrow and grief. Politics frustrates us and angers us to the point of distraction and even irrational behavior. Loss of a job, or unemployment often sends our confidence packing for unknown countries. Divorce from a spouse totally trashes our perspective on life. Adversities attack us and unsettles us and cause us to worry or get angry or even to become bitter toward one another.

But we don't have to let adversity get us down. We just need to look at life from a different perspective. It would have been easy for Itzhak Pearlman to have given up even as a child. But he used that adversity to learn the violin and become a master musician in the midst of it. Instead of crumbling at the disability he had to face because of polio, Pearlman was able to use that adversity to make it become a benefit for him. Instead of his focusing on not being able to walk or run like everyone else, he allowed God to guide him into the love of music and to specialize in the violin.

Surely there must have been times when Itzhak felt cheated or short-changed or robbed of opportunity. But as often as it is, those who excel in something usually have a deficiency in another area of their life. That deficiency (or adversity) makes them focus on something else that they **can** do instead of focusing on what they **can't** do.

And even when he thinks he might have life licked and all its troubles solved, when a string breaks in at the very beginning of a concert, instead of getting angry, or throwing up his hands and giving up, he buckles down and focusses on what CAN happen instead of what can't happen. Even if it's never been done before! Often the most amazing things are done because an adversity forces people to adapt their life and adjust to the situation and to bring about the astounding, because of the hardship confronting them. Let me give you another example of what I mean.

“A daughter complained to her father about how hard things were for her. ‘As soon as I solve one problem,’ she said, ‘another one comes up. I'm tired of struggling.’

“Her father, a chef, took her to the kitchen where he filled three pots with water and placed each

one on a high fire. Soon the pots came to a boil. In one he placed carrots; in the second, eggs; and in the last, whole coffee beans. He let them sit and boil, without saying a word.

“The daughter impatiently waited, wondering what he was doing. After a while, he went over and turned off the burners. He fished out the carrots and placed them in a bowl. He pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. He poured the coffee into a bowl. Turning to her he asked, ‘Darling, what do you see?’

“Carrots, eggs, and coffee,’ she replied.

“He brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. He then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg. Finally, he asked her to sip the coffee. She smiled, as she tasted its rich flavor.

“She asked, ‘What does it mean, Father?’ He explained that each of them had faced the same adversity – boiling water – but each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting, but after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg was fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior, but after sitting through the boiling water, its inside hardened. The coffee beans were unique, however. By being in the boiling water, they changed the water.²

Adversity can either mess us up and cause us to lose our way, or it can change us so that we can change our surroundings. The way we respond to the struggles and trials and adversities of life will depend upon how we live and where we put our trust and faith.

And that’s what Jesus tells His disciples in our Scripture lesson tonight. He tells them that there are always struggles and trials that seek to turn us up-side-down, or to sink our boats, **but** if we have our priorities in the right order, there is always a benefit that can come.

Just before His own arrest, even as one of His own disciples was selling Him out to the Pharisees, Jesus reminds the 11 that there are steps to finding His peace in the middle of the adversity of

² (*More Perfect Illustrations*, pg. 8)

life. Notice what He tells them, *“If anyone loves Me, he will follow My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him”* (John 14:23). Love of Jesus not only changes our life so that we follow His ways and obey His commands, but we invite the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit into our lives to stir us and encourage us.

But remember, as we turn to Jesus, the world will turn against us, and it will do its best to turn us away from Jesus again. And if we choose not to follow the invitation to give up on Jesus, we stand strong in our faith, all sorts of hardships and struggles and trials will be thrown our way as “punishment” for not following the world. But Jesus tells us to be glad when the world turns against us, because that shows us just how focused we are on following Him (Matthew 5:11-12). Instead, we are to use the persecution that comes from the world and turn it into an opportunity to grow deeper in our faith.

So, to love Jesus is the first step in finding His help and encouragement when life turns sour with disappointment and struggle. If we choose NOT to follow Jesus’ commands, we really do not show any love for Jesus. Therefore we go our own way and receive no support or encouragement or help from God. We forfeit the indwelling of God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit if we reject God’s ways. To find the Lord living within us, we must first seek the Lord and follow His commands. To find peace from the adversity of life, we need to follow Jesus.

But we’re not left on our own to find Jesus in this dark, sinful world. No, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to remind us of His promise to be with us and in us when adversity strikes out at us (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit always points us back to Jesus’ work of love for us as He endured the worst that the world could throw at Him, picked up the tab for the cost of our sin, and then brought us new life through His resurrection from death. Jesus did that so that we would not have to worry about anything if we put our trust and faith in Him. Listen again to what He told us: *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, nor fearful”* (John 14:27). (...nor let them be afraid)

Did you hear that? Jesus leaves us His PEACE if we choose to trust Him enough to love Him

and follow His ways. Even when faced or in the middle of strife, or struggle, Jesus provides peace to us. Even when the world around us is burning with hatred and jealousy, even if the streets are filled with riots and protests, even if the boss is breathing down our necks, or the prognosis of our ailment seems hopeless, or the paycheck doesn't clear the bank, or the kids have to learn from home, or policies change that affect our everyday life, JESUS GIVES US PEACE when we trust in Him and follow His ways!

Now He knew that trials and hardships would come. He said it to the 11 right there in the upper room, "*You heard that I said to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you'*" (Jn. 14:28). He knew that He had to die on the cross. He knew there would be tremendous suffering and even death – but then the resurrection would come and all those sufferings would be put to rest! He knew that adversity would happen before the peace could come. He says, "*And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe*" (Jn. 14:29).

Friends, remember Jesus' words, "*In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world*" (Jn. 16:33). And then again, "*Peace...My peace I give to you...*" (Jn. 14:27)

So as you face all kinds of adversity, as you struggle and strive to make your way in these difficult and often disappointing times, keep on believing in Jesus. Don't let the world push you into leaving the ways of God for this world, for that is the only place we can find peace is with Jesus. Keep following Jesus' commands. Stay faithful to His Word and find God living in you. Jesus knows what's going to happen in this world, so do not lose heart, do not worry, and do not grow weary in disappointment. Be at peace! To the glory of God in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN.