

~Other Speakers S-Z: T. DeWitt Talmage:

"God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Revelation 7:17).

Riding across a western prairie, wild flowers up to the hub of the carriage wheel, and while a long distance from any shelter, there came a sudden shower, and while the rain was falling in torrents, the sun was shining as brightly as ever I saw it shine; and I thought, What a beautiful spectacle this is! So the tears of the Bible are not midnight storm, but rain on pansied prairies in God's sweet and golden sunlight. You remember that bottle which David labeled as containing tears, and Mary's tears, and Paul's tears, and Christ's tears, and the harvest of joy that is to spring from the sowing of tears. God mixes them. God rounds them. God shows them where to fall. God exhales them. A census is taken of them, and there is a record as to the moment when they are born, and as to the place of their grave. Tears of bad men are not kept. Alexander, in his sorrow, had the hair clipped from his horses and mules, and made a great ado about his grief; but in all the vases of Heaven there is not one of Alexander's tears. I speak of the tears of the good. Alas, me! They are falling all the time. In summer, you sometimes hear the growling thunder, and you see there is a storm miles away; but you know from the drift of the clouds that it will not come anywhere near you. So, though it may be all bright around about us, there is a shower of trouble somewhere all the time. You think it is the cannonading that you hear along the banks of the Danube. No. It is the thunder of clouds of trouble over the groaning hospitals, and over the desolated Russian and Turkish homes. Tears! Tears!

What is the use of them anyhow? Why not substitute laughter? Why not make this a world where all the people are well, and eternal strangers to pain and aches? What is the use of an eastern storm when we might have a perpetual nor'wester? Why, when a family is put together, not have them all stay, or if they must be transplanted to make other homes, then have them all live? The family record telling a story of marriages and births, but of no deaths. Why not have the harvests chase each other without fatiguing toil, and all our homes afflicted? Why the hard pillow, the hard crust, the hard struggle? It is easy enough to explain a smile, or a success, or a congratulation; but, come now, and bring all your dictionaries and all your philosophies and all your religions, and help me this evening to explain a tear. A chemist will tell you that it is made up of salt and lime, and other component parts; but he misses the chief ingredients - the acid of a soured life, the viper sting of a bitter memory, the fragments of a broken heart. I will tell you what a tear is; it is agony in solution.

Hear me, then, while I discourse to you of the Ministry of tears, and of the ending of that Ministry when God shall wipe them all away.

First. It is the Ministry of tears to keep this world from being too attractive. Something must be done to make us willing to quit this existence. If it were not for trouble, this world would be a good enough Heaven for me. You and I would be willing to take a lease of this life for a hundred million years, if there were no trouble. The earth cushioned and upholstered and pillared and chandeliered with such expense, no story of other worlds could enchant us. We would say: "Let well enough alone. If you want to die and have your body disintegrated in the dust, and your soul go out on a celestial adventure, then you can go; but this world is good enough for me." You might as well go to a man who has just entered the Louvre at Paris, and tell him to hasten off to the picture galleries of Venice or Florence. "Why," he would say, "what is the use of my going there? There are Rembrandts and Rubens and Rapbaels here that I haven't looked at yet." No man wants to go out of this world, or out of any house until he has a better house.

To cure this wish to stay here, God must somehow create a disgust for our surroundings. How shall He do it? He cannot afford to deface His horizon, or to tear off a fiery panel from the sunset, or to subtract an anther from the water lily, or to banish the pungent aroma from the mignonette, or to drag the robes of the morning in the mire. You cannot expect a Christopher Wren to mar his own St. Paul's Cathedral, or a Michelangelo to dash out his own "Last Judgment," or a Handel to discord his "Israel in Egypt"; and you cannot expect God to spoil the architecture and music of His own world. How then are we to be made willing to leave? Here is where troubles comes in. After a man has had a good deal of trouble, he says, "Well, I am ready to go. If there is a house somewhere whose roof doesn't leak, I would like to live there. If there is an atmosphere somewhere that does not distress the lungs, I would like to breathe it. If there is a society somewhere where there is no tittle-tattle, I would like to live there. If there is a home circle somewhere where I can find my lost friends, I would like to go there." He used to read the first part of the Bible chiefly, now he reads the last part of the Bible chiefly. Why has he changed Genesis for Revelation? Ah! He used to be anxious chiefly to know how this world was made, and all about its geological construction. Now he is chiefly anxious to know how the next world was made, and how it looks, and who live there, and how they dress. He reads Revelation ten times now where he reads Genesis once. The old story, "In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth," does not thrill him half as much

as the other story, "I saw a new Heaven and a new earth." The old man's hand trembles as he turns over this apocalyptic leaf, and he has to take out his handkerchief to wipe his spectacles. That book of Revelation is a prospectus now of the country into which he is to soon immigrate; the country in which he has lots already laid out, and avenues opened, and trees planted, and mansions built. The thought of that blessed place comes over me mightily, and I declare that if this house were a great ship, and you all were passengers on board it, and one hand could launch that ship into the glories of Heaven, I should be tempted to take the responsibility, and launch you all into glory with one stroke, holding on to the side of the boat until I could get in myself! And yet there are people here to whom this world is brighter than Heaven. Well, dear souls, I do not blame you. It is natural. But after a while you will be ready to go. It was not until Job had been worn out with bereavements and carbuncles and a pest of a wife that he wanted to see God. It was not until the prodigal got tired of living among the hogs that he wanted to go to his father's house. It is the Ministry of trouble to make this world worth less, and heaven worth more.

Again: it is the Ministry of trouble to make us feel our complete dependence upon God. King Alphonso said that if he had been present at the Creation, he could have made a better world than this. What a pity he was not present! I do not know what God will do when some men die. Men think they can do anything until God shows them they can do nothing at all. We lay out great plans, and we like to execute them. It looks big, God comes and takes us down. As Prometheus was assaulted by his enemy, when the lance struck him it opened a great swelling that had threatened his death, and he got well. So it is the arrow of trouble that lets out great swellings of pride. We never feel our dependence upon God until we get trouble. I was riding with my little child along a road, and she asked if she might drive. I said, "Certainly." I handed over the reins to her, and I had to admire the glee with which she drove. But after a while we met a team, and we had to turn out. The road was narrow, and it was sheer down on both sides. She handed the reins over to me, and said: "I think you had better take charge of the horse." So we are all children; and on this road of life we like to drive. It gives one such an appearance of superiority and power. It looks big. But after a while we meet some obstacle, and we have to turn out, and the road is narrow, and it is sheer down on both sides, and then we are willing that God should take the reins and drive. Ah! my friends, we get upset so often because we do not hand over the reins soon enough.

Can you not tell when you hear a man pray, whether he has ever had any trouble? I can. The cadence, the phraseology indicate it. Why do women pray better than men? Because they have had more trouble. Before a man has had any trouble, his prayers are poetic, and he begins away up among the sun, moon, and stars, and gives the Lord a great deal of astronomical information that must be highly gratifying. He then comes on down gradually over beautiful table lands to "for ever and ever, amen." But after a man has had trouble, prayer is with him a taking hold of the arm of God and crying out for help. I have heard earnest prayers on two or three occasions that I remember. Once, on the Cincinnati express train going at forty miles the hour, and the train jumped the track, and we were near a chasm eighty feet deep; and the men who, a few minutes before, had been swearing and blaspheming God, began to pull and jerk at the bell rope, and got up on the backs of the seats, and cried out: "O God, save us!" There was another time about eight hundred miles out at sea, on a foundering steamer, after the last lifeboat had been split finer than kindling wood. They prayed then. Why is it you so often hear people, in reciting the last experience of some friend, say; "He made the most beautiful prayer I ever heard"? What makes it beautiful? It is the earnestness of it. Oh, I tell you a man is in earnest when his stripped and naked soul wades out in the soundless, shoreless, bottomless ocean of eternity.

It is trouble, my friends, that makes us feel our dependence upon God. We do not know our own weakness or God's strength until the last plank breaks. It is contemptible in us, when there is nothing else to take hold of, that we catch hold of God only. A man is unfortunate in business. He has to raise a great deal of money, and raise it quickly. He borrows on word and note all he can borrow. After a while, he puts a mortgage on his house. After a while he puts a second mortgage on his house. Then he puts a lien on his furniture. Then he makes over his life insurance. Then he assigns all his property. Then he goes to his father-in-law and asks for help! Well, having failed everywhere, completely failed, he gets down on his knees and says: "O Lord, I have tried everybody and everything, now help me out of this financial trouble." He makes God the last resort instead of the first resort. There are men who have paid ten cents on a dollar who could have paid a hundred cents on a dollar if they had gone to God in time. Why you do not know who the Lord is. He is not an autocrat seated far up in a palace from which He emerges once a year, preceded by heralds swinging swords to clear the way. No. But a Father willing, at our call, to stand by us in every crisis and predicament of life.

I tell you what some of you business men make me think of. A young man goes off from home to earn his fortune. He goes with his mother's consent and benediction. She has large wealth; but he wants to make his own fortune. He goes far away, falls sick, gets out of money. He sends to the hotel keeper where he is staying, asking for lenience, and the answer he gets is, "If you don't pay up Saturday night you'll be removed to the

hospital." The young man sends to a comrade in the same building. No help. He writes to a banker who was a friend of his deceased father. No relief. He writes to an old schoolmate, but gets no help. Saturday night comes, and he is moved to the hospital. Getting there he is frenzied with grief; and he borrows a sheet of paper and a postage stamp, and he sits down, and he writes home, saying: "Dear mother, I am sick unto death. Come." It is ten minutes of ten o'clock when she gets the letter. At ten o'clock the train starts. She is five minutes from the depot. She gets there in time to have five minutes to spare. She wonders why a train that can go thirty miles an hour cannot go sixty miles an hour. She rushes into the hospital. She says: "My son, what does all this mean? Why didn't you send for me? You sent to everybody but me. You knew I could and would help you. Is this the reward I get for my kindness to you always?" She bundles him up, takes him home, and gets him well very soon. Now, some of you treat God just as that young man treated his mother. When you get into a financial perplexity, you call on the banker, you call on the broker, you call on your creditors, you call on your lawyer for legal counsel, you call upon everybody, and when you cannot get any help then you go to God. You say: "O Lord, I come to Thee. Help me now out of my perplexity." And the Lord comes though it is the eleventh hour. He says: "Why did you not send for Me before? As One whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." It is to throw us back upon an all comforting God that we have this Ministry of tears.

Again: it is the Ministry of tears to capacitate us for the office of Sympathy. The priests under the old dispensation were set apart by having water sprinkled on their hands, feet, and head; and by the sprinkling of tears people are now set apart to the office of sympathy. When we are in prosperity, we like to have a great many young people around us, and we laugh when they laugh, and we romp when they romp, and we sing when they sing; but when we have trouble we like plenty of old folks around. Why? They know how to talk. Take an aged mother, seventy years of age, and she is almost omnipotent in comfort. Why? She has been through it all. At seven o'clock in the morning she goes over to comfort a young mother who has just lost her babe. Grandmother knows all about that trouble. Fifty years ago she felt it. At twelve o'clock of that day she goes over to comfort a widowed soul. She knows all about that. She has been walking in that dark valley twenty years. At four o'clock in the afternoon some one knocks at the door wanting bread. She knows all about that. Two or three times in her life she came to her last loaf. At ten o'clock that night she goes over to sit up with some one severely sick. She knows all about it. She knows all about fevers and pleurisy's and broken bones. She has been doctoring all her life, spreading plasters and pouring out bitter drops, and shaking up hot pillows, and contriving things to tempt a poor appetite. Doctors Abernethy and Rush and Ilosack and Harvey were great doctors; but the greatest doctor the world ever saw is an old Christian woman. Dear me! Do we not remember her about the room when we were sick in our boyhood? Was there any one who could ever so touch a sore without hurting it? And when she lifted her spectacles against her wrinkled forehead so she could look closer at the wound, it was three fourths healed. And when the Lord took her home, although you may have been men and women thirty, forty, fifty years of age, you lay on the coffin lid and sobbed as though you were only five or ten years of age. O man, praise God if, instead of looking back to one of these berouged and bespangled old people fixed up of the devil to look young, you have in your memory the picture of an honest, sympathetic, kind, self sacrificing, Christ like mother. Oh, it takes these people who have had trouble to comfort others in trouble. Where did Paul get the ink with which to write his comforting epistle? Where did David get the ink to write his comforting psalms? Where did John get the ink to write his comforting revelation? They got it out of their own tears. When a man has gone through the curriculum, and has taken a course of dungeons and imprisonments and shipwrecks, he is qualified for the work of sympathy.

When I began to preach, I used to write out all my sermons, and I sometimes have great curiosity to look at the sermons I used to preach on trouble. They were nearly all poetic and in verse; but God knocked the blank verse out of me long ago; and I have found out that I cannot comfort people except as I myself have been troubled. God make me the son of consolation to the people. I would rather be the means of soothing one perturbed spirit today, than to play a tune that would set all the sons of mirth reeling in the dance. I am a herb doctor. I put in the caldron the Root out of dry ground without form or comeliness. Then I put in the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley. Then I put into the caldron some of the leaves from the Tree of Life, and the branch that was thrown into the wilderness Marab. Then I pour in the tears of Bethany and Golgotha; then I stir them up. Then I kindle under the caldron a fire made out of the wood of the Cross, and one drop of that potion will cure the worst sickness that ever afflicted a human soul. Mary and Martha shall receive their Lazarus from the tomb. The damsel shall rise. And on the darkness shall break the morning, and God will wipe all tears from their eyes.

You know on a well spread table, the food becomes more delicate at the last. I have fed you today with the bread of consolation. Let the table now be cleared, and let us set on the chalice of Heaven. Let the King's cup bearers come in. Good morning, Heaven! "Oh," says some critic in the audience, "the Bible contradicts itself. It intimates again and again that there are to be no tears in Heaven, and if there be no tears in Heaven, how is it possible that God will wipe any away?" I answer, have you never seen a child crying one moment and laughing

the next; and while she was laughing, you saw the tears still on its face? And, perhaps, you stopped her in the very midst of her resumed glee, and wiped off those delayed tears. So, I think, after the Heavenly raptures have come upon us, there may be the mark of some earthly grief, and while those tears are glittering in the light of the jasper sea, God will wipe them away. How well He can do that.

Jesus had enough trial to make Him sympathetic with all trial. The shortest verse in the Bible tells the story: "Jesus wept." The scar on the back of either hand, the scar on the arch of either foot, the row of scars along the line of the hair, will keep all Heaven thinking. Oh, that great Weeper is just the one to silence all earthly trouble and wipe out all stains of earthly grief. Gentle! Why His step is softer than the step of the dew. It will not be a tyrant bidding you to hush up your crying. It will be a Father who will take you on His left arm, His face gleaming into yours, while with the soft tips of the fingers of the right hand, He shall wipe away all tears from your eyes. I have noticed when the children get hurt, and their mother is away from home, they always come to me for comfort and sympathy; but I have noticed that when the children get hurt, and their mother is at home, they go right past me and to her I am of no account. So when the soul comes up into Heaven out of the wounds of this life, it will not stop to look for Paul, or Moses, or David, or John. These did very well once, but now the soul shall rush past, crying: "Where is Jesus? Where is Jesus?" Dear Lord, what a magnificent thing to die if Thou shalt thus wipe away our tears. I think it will take us some time to get used to Heaven; the fruits of God without one speck; the fresh pastures without one nettle; the orchestra without one snapped string; the river of gladness without one torn bank; the solferinos and the saffron of sunrise and sunset swallowed up in the eternal day that beams from God's countenance!

Why should I wish to linger in the wild, When Thou art waiting, Father, to receive Thy child?

Sirs, if we could get any appreciation of what God has in reserve for us, it would make us so home sick we would be unfit for our every day work. Professor Leonard, in Iowa University, put in my hands a meteoric stone, a stone thrown off from some other world to this. How suggestive it was to me. And I have to tell you the best representations we have of Heaven are only aerolites flung off from that world which rolls on being the multitudes of the redeemed. We analyze these aerolites, and find them crystalizations of tears. No wonder, flung off from Heaven. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Have you any appreciation this evening of the good and glorious times your friends are having in Heaven? How different it is when they get news there of a Christian's death from what it is here. It is the difference between embarkation and coming into port. Everything depends upon which side of the river you stand when you hear of a Christian's death. If you stand on this side of the river you mourn that they go. If you stand on the other side of the river, you rejoice that they come. Oh, the difference between a funeral on earth and a jubilee in Heaven - between requiem here and triumphal march there - parting here and reunion there. Together! Have you thought of it? They are together. Not one of your departed friends in one land, and another in another land; but together in different rooms of the same house - the house of many mansions. Together! I never appreciated that thought so much as recently, when we laid away in her last slumber my sister Sarah. Standing there in the village cemetery, I looked around and said: "There is father, there is mother, there is grandfather, there is grandmother, there are whole circles of kindred"; and I thought to myself, "Together in the grave - together in glory." I am so impressed with the thought that I do not think it is any fanaticism when some one is going from this world to the next if you make them the bearer of dispatches to your friends who are gone, saying: "Give my love to my parents, give my love to my children, give my love to my old comrades who are in glory, and tell them I am trying to fight the good fight of faith, and I will join them after a while." I believe the message will be delivered; and I believe it will increase the gladness of those who are before the throne. Together are they, all their tears gone. No trouble getting good society for them. All kings, queens, princes, and princesses. In 1751 there was a bill offered in your English Parliament, proposing to change the almanac so that the first of March should come immediately after the 18th of February. But, oh, what a glorious change in the calendar when all the years of your earthly existence are swallowed up in the eternal year of God!

My friends, take this good cheer home with you. Those tears of bereavement that course your cheek, and of persecution and of trial, are not always to be there. The motherly hand of God will wipe them all away. What is the use, on the way to such a consummation - what is the use of fretting about anything? Oh, what an exhilaration it ought to be in Christian work. See you the pinnacles against the sky? It is the city of our God; and we are approaching it. Oh, let us be busy in the few days that shall remain for us. The Saxons and the Britons went out to battle. The Saxons were all armed. The Britons had no weapons at all; and yet history tells us the Britons got the victory. Why? They went into battle shouting three times "Hallelujah!" and at the third shout of "Hallelujah" their enemies fled panic struck; and so the Britons got the victory. And, my friends, if we could only appreciate the glories that are to come, we would be so filled with enthusiasm that no power of earth

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or hell could stand before us; and at our first shout the opposing forces would begin to tremble, and at our second shout they would begin to fall back, and at our third shout they would be routed forever. There is no power on earth or in hell that could stand before three such volleys of Hallelujah.

I put this balsam on the recent wounds of your heart. Rejoice at the thought of what your departed friends have got rid of, and that you have a prospect of so soon making your own escape. Bear cheerfully the Ministry of tears, and exult at the thought that soon it is to be ended.

There we shall march up the Heavenly street, and ground our arms at Jesus' feet.