

Tried Like Gold

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- [0 : 00] Let us join together in the worship of God. We shall sing to his praise from Psalm 57. Psalm 57, from the beginning down to the verse marked 5.
- Be merciful to me, O God, thy mercy unto me do thou extend, because my soul doth put her trust in thee.
- Yea, in the shadow of thy wings my refuge I will place, until these sad calamities do holly overpass. My cry I will cause to ascend, unto the Lord most high, to God who doth all things for me perform most perfectly.
- From heaven he shall send down, and me from his reproach defend, that would devour me. God is truth, and mercy forth shall send. My soul among fierce lion's youth.
- I firebrands live among men's sons, whose teeth are spears and darts. A sharp sword is their tongue. Be thou exalted very high, above the heavens, O God.
- [1 : 21] Let thou thy glory be advanced, o'er all the earth abroad. Let us sing these verses from the beginning of Psalm 57, to verse 5.
- Be merciful to me, O God, thy mercy unto me. Be merciful to me, O God, and mercy unto me.
- To thou thy God, O God, and mercy unto me. To thou in heaven, O God, and mercy unto me. To thou in heaven, O God, and mercy unto me.
- Be ■■■ country unto me.
- Be merciful to me.
- [2 : 35] He said proud of the peace The holy overness My god, your oh-chop All to us and come to the Lord's side.
- Thank you. Glory to■■■■ who is now the Craighanrab in Romples, Thou played by Lauderdaleo.
- From heaven he shall send God a key, From his reproach he may, The Lord devour me, glorious will, And mercy, Lord, consent.
- My soul of fire is dry on his, Like my crowns in a mine, And sons will give the spirit of dark, The stars for this their turn.
- The earth makes us in bed, Let the city hall be at home, Let us join together in prayer. Let us pray.
- [5 : 28] Lord, our prayer is the prayer of the psalmist. We come pleading thy mercy as those who are in need of it and who do not deserve it.
- Of goats or of bulls, but the blood of the unblemished lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world.

Lord, we pray that you would remember us this day as we call upon your name as part of your church here on earth. We give thanks that you have such a church, that it does not consist of buildings, that it is not made of walls, of brick or of stone, but that it is made up of your people and that you have bound them together around the chief cornerstone upon which your favour lies.

We pray that you would bless us today in his name, the one who inhabits eternity sitting at the right hand of the majesty on high.

We give thanks that he is there by right, that he belongs in your presence as your son, who is the eternal, holy begotten son of the father.

[7 : 27] But that he came into this world and took upon him the sins of the world and went to the cross on our behalf.

And there he fulfilled all righteousness and he bore away the sins of his people. That we delight in, that we know of it from the gospel and that you have indelibly imprinted it upon our hearts.

That he is the one to whom we can come. And we pray that you would add to the number those who would seek him even today. With the promise given to them that those who seek him early will find him.

Bless the gospel as it is proclaimed. Within our hearing and wherever your people gather today, be they in their own homes or in places appointed for gatherings of your people.

We give thanks that there is nothing that will hinder it, even as your servant the apostle confessed it. That it would have free course. And we bless you and thank you that when it goes out with power, that there is none who can thwart it or turn it away from impacting upon their lives.

[8 : 44] Either to bring them to confession and to contrition and to close in with Christ as the alone saviour of sinners. Or to hold them accountable at their great day when all must answer at a throne of judgement.

So hear our prayers today as we call upon you. Seeking your blessing upon us and upon our homes and families. Remembering our congregations.

Remembering all who belong to your number. The number of your people. May they be blessed according to need, whatever that need may be. Be it great or small.

We give thanks that you are as able to deal with the great needs as you are with the needs that may appear to us to be of little consequence. You govern our lives with authority over all things.

Even the birds of the air are under your jurisdiction. Not one of them will fall to the ground and be known to you.

[9 : 49] You can count the hairs of our heads. And we give thanks that you have so decreed that all things which are done in your name will return to your glory.

We pray your blessing upon all who are under your hand today. We remember in your presence those who are suffering from illness of any description.

We still are suffering because of the pandemic. And we know that there are some who are still hospitalised. And we pray for the recovery. And ask that you would look after those who are looking after them.

That they may be kept safe. That they may be kept safe. We remember those who have grief in their heart because of the loss that they have suffered by having loved ones taken from them.

This is the case the world over. We know the numbers as far as they are recorded in our own nation. And in some of the nations of the earth that are able to do that.

- [10 : 52] But there are many third world countries and in a world that are less privileged than we are in the western world.
- And there may be no reckoning of numbers. But there is one truth that is always the case. That your eye is upon every one of us without any one of your people being lost to your side.
- You watch over them as the apple of your eye. You do not tolerate the harm to be done to them. And we give thanks that all who are yours will be yours for time and for eternity.
- Pray that you would remember our nation. Those who govern us wherever that takes place. Be it in Westminster or in Edinburgh. Pray that you would remember our own local council.
- And those who serve upon any part of the power brokers of the land. We remember them to you. Pray for wisdom. Pray for direction.
- [11 : 58] Pray for insights to be given to them. Because you are the one who is the only wise God. Your word reminds us of the wisdom that is yours and yours alone.
- And that we have wisdom in even turning to you. And knowing what it is to take shadow as we were singing.
- Under the covert of your wings. And learning to do that even at this sad time. Until these calamities as the psalmist said would wholly overpass.
- We give thanks that we can sing in our hearts and praise your name. Even among the nations along with them throughout the world.
- We pray that you would bless all who are waiting upon you this day. The number is beyond our reckoning. But we give thanks that you have people of every age.
- [13 : 01] And throughout every generation. Until the day comes. When the day break and the shadows flee away. And you bring to yourself all of the number who bear your name.
- And will be with you throughout all eternity. Continue to watch over us throughout this day. Blessing your word to all who would hear it. Encourage others to stir themselves up to seek your name.
- And to seek grace for their need in your word. And the preaching of it. Continue with us we pray. Forgiving every sin in Jesus name.
- We ask it. Amen. We're going to hear the word of God as we have it in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Old Testament Scriptures.
- And we're reading from the book of the prophet Zechariah. And chapter 13. Zechariah chapter 13. Zechariah chapter 13.
- [14 : 35] Zechariah chapter 13.
- Zechariah chapter 13.
- Awake, O sword, against my shepherd. And against the man that is my fellow. Saith the Lord of hosts. Smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered.
- And I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. And it shall come to pass that in all the land. And I will bring the third part through the fire.
- and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried. And they shall call on my name, and I will hear them.
- [16 : 17] I will say it is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God. Amen, and may the Lord add his blessing to this reading of his word, and to his name be the praise.
- I would like us now to turn for a short while to this passage that we read, and particularly the words of verse 9. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried.

They shall call on my name, and I will hear them. I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God.

Amongst the many things that the ongoing pandemic has done, it is said to have tested the resilience of the structures of government, education, and perhaps most obviously our health service.

Questions are being asked, or being put to one side, for future discussion about the durability, strength, and robustness of the framework of our society when it is being challenged.

[17 : 48] I think it is admitted by some, at least, that in all the strategies of central government, as to how to react to a global pandemic, this was not a well-formed plan.

Or it wasn't as planned, or it wasn't as planned, or it wasn't as planned, well-planned as they thought it was. We often hear the well-worn phrase, We must learn lessons from these things.

But this is not just true of all the tiers of government. It is also true of the church. In a recent meeting, as many of our meetings are carried out by Zoom, our church leaders, one of the trustees stated honestly, that of all the possible future scenarios the church may end up facing.

And these were discussed and plans made to deal with them if they arose. And, in a global pandemic, a global pandemic was not one of these things that was considered.

But the events that unfolded have exposed a great many things that may otherwise have been ignored or remained hidden. The fact of the matter is this.

[19 : 20] God is not merely a spectator of world events. He is in control of these events. Those of us who are taught the words of the Shorter Catechism will remember that God is the God of Providence, and that His works of Providence are His most holy, wise and powerful, preserving all His creatures and all their actions.

The person who is an unbeliever will no doubt deny this, but the words of Fisher's Catechism are helpful in this point to deny God, or to deny that God governs the world, is to deny that God is.

Now, I mention this because, while we may all legitimately engage in the questions of government and society in general, take part in them or pay attention to them as they are considered.

If we are Christians, it is incumbent upon us to ask the questions of God, what are you doing and for what reason?

Not in an accusatory way, or in order to lay charges at His feet, because as Christians we should be able to say He does all things well.

[20 : 43] But as Christians we should be seeking to understand the implications of what is being done, what is being done for me, for others like me, for society as a whole, and for future generations.

Now, I am not saying that because you will ask the questions, you will always get the answers, or the answers you are seeking. But we have to remember that we may find ourselves in situations where we turn to God, and we expect God to make known to us in some way what He is doing and why.

And sometimes that is not the case. Now, what has this to do with the passage before us? A passage that is dealing with future events surrounding the coming of Messiah, in the guise of the Shepherd of His people.

Jesus, who in the Gospel speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd, is foretold to be the smitten Shepherd, smitten by the Lord God.

Some inevitably question the interpretation of these words, but it cannot be denied that one understanding that bears scrutiny is that it is God who orders the sword to strike the shepherd, even though the shepherd is His fellow.

- [22 : 12] He smites His own, yet He rejects Israel. But I want to notice today's this, how He deals with His own people who are described as the remnant by some, the one-third of which something is said in this context.

I want us to see, first of all, the emphasis that falls on the activity of God. He says, I will bring. Secondly, I want to identify what that activity entails.

And thirdly, how they are to respond to this. First of all, the activity of God. And I will bring the third part through the fire, that's what the Prophet says.

When we think of world events, we must think of them as being the sovereign activity of our Creator God. We've already alluded to that fact.

Throughout the history of the world, there have been seismic events that many have identified as God's doing.

- [23 : 27] Some of the Lord's people, as we said, are glad, because they know it to be God, and are thankful that they can trust Him, no matter what these events entail, even what they do not understand.

Of course, there are times when even the Lord's people are silent, because they have nothing to say. And there shall wisdom in saying nothing, when there's nothing that we can say.

The wisdom of the psalmist comes to the fore, be still and know that I am God. He is recognizing that all must submit to the authority of God, even the Gentile nations to whom these words are addressed in Psalm 46.

People who do not know God or acknowledge Him as their own. But what we have here is a very definite, I will bring. It is the same person whose sword it is, who is now turning his hand on the little ones.

And that is what we want to focus on. I want us to consider what this activity entails. I will bring them through the fire, he says.

- [24 : 47] I will refine them as silver is refined. I will try them as gold is tried. When we think of the current events, it is plain that there are different experiences, as well as different outcomes of these experiences.

For example, we all respond differently to the challenges that we face, as a result of restrictions of movement. If lockdown means what it is supposed to mean, then we are very much limited as to the time spent outside of our homes.

Obviously this means something different to those who live in the densely populated areas of the towns and cities. To what it means to a rural dweller.

Social interaction is forbidden to all except in a limited capacity. And so on. These are things that we can think of. There are many examples that we could cite.

But if we think of it, there are examples which arise out of the pandemic, which we could consider to be testing, trying, proving and purifying.

- [26 : 06] It means something different to those who are Christians, as opposed to those who are not. For example, in the Psalms there is a clear difference made between what God is doing to his people, and those who are not of that number.

I refer you to the words of Psalm 11. The Psalm is there says, The Lord tries the righteous, but the wicked, and him that loves violence, his soul hateth.

The inference is that God tries his people, but judges those who are not. This speaks of the end result. Samuel Rutherford, the great Scottish divine, stated, Using the examples of false weights, people who sought to advance themselves by taking bits of weights, so that the weight would be a false weight.

He writes, Such are the men that are found light in God's balance. Windy, light and soft men. When God puts his hand to them, they cannot abide a touch, but go all to pieces, he says.

All to pieces in his hands. They cannot suffer trouble, but they melt in the fire, and are worse after, are downfall than before.

[27 : 42] These God casts away. But still, God tries his own people. He tests, and he purifies. The scripture is full of these images, where the refiner's fire is used to describe what God is doing.

We have the well-known words of Malachi. God, he says, shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. And he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

It is important to remember, the Lord is doing something for which there is an end product. He removes the dross from the lives of his own people, just as happens when molten metal endures the heat.

But as the psalmist concludes, thou hast caused men to ride over our heads. We went through fire and water. But, he says, thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.

The words of Robert Murray McJane spring to mind. It is the treading of the grapes that brings out the sweet juices of the vine.

[29 : 04] So it is afflictions that draws forth submission, weanedness from the world and complete rest in God.

We know that there are times that the Lord deals with us as individuals, sometimes as a society or a generation such as our own. And the wise man counsels us to yield to the correction of the Lord.

My son despised not the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his correction. For whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

The wonderful thing about what God does is that it is contoured to your need, and obviously to his glory.

Take for example the experience of confinement or being alone. Some may hate this and find it difficult to put up with.

[30 : 09] Others, on the other hand, may prefer their own company. And they are not really social beings, so lack of interaction is not all that much of a trial.

God knows this. And if his end product is to be achieved, he will achieve it by some other means. No one will lose out. There is a television programme that many watch that follows the work of very skilled tradesmen and women, who in their own field produce marvellous results.

It can be metal work or woodwork, working with fabrics, preparing musical instruments or clocks, and every one of them is a master in his own field.

Recently I was watching the restoration of an engagement ring, which had been lost and had lain for a long time on a gravel driveway, and subsequently had been driven over repeatedly, resulting in a mangled broken down piece of useless jewellery.

The gold band was worked and the clasp that retained the diamond and sapphire precious stones was broken. Now the jeweller, or goldsmith, replaced part of the gold band with a truer band with the aid of heat.

[31 : 34] But he indicated that when the heat was applied to the gold, the stones would also be touched by the heat. The diamond could tolerate any amount, whereas the sapphire, he said, would turn black.

And if the circumstances were not as they should, if a wisp of wind blew at a long time, or a drop of moisture hit the sapphire while it was in a state of heat, then it would cause it to fracture irreparably.

Of course, because of the skill involved this did not happen, with the result that what was produced was one beautifully restored ring. But we have a master jeweller in God, and when he is involved in polishing his jewels or removing the dross from our lives, he will never overdo things.

We may think that he has, particularly when we are onlookers to him at work in other people's lives, but he knows what he is doing.

Richard Kean wrote the following words, When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie, his grace all sufficient shall be your supply.

[32 : 57] The flame shall not hurt you, his only design, your dross to consume and your gold to define. So how do the Lord's people respond to what God is doing?

We read here, That they shall call on my name, and I will hear them. I will say, it is my people. And they shall say, the Lord is my God.

As we have said, there may be times when the believer thinks these things are meant for my destruction. If you remember Jacob's experience against me are all these things.

But after these thoughts, which are ill thoughts, why would God do what he is doing? The idols of many in this world are like that.

People are their playthings. If they feel like harming them, they will, with no reason. But that is not the God of Scripture, the God Jehovah.

[34 : 05] When his people cry to him, he answers, The God who hears is the God who saves. I will say, and they will say.

God does not need to be told he loves his people. He knows that. But they need to tell him they know that. They need to remind themselves of what they know.

Were we not referring to Rabbi Duncan the other night, who doubted his love for God as to its genuineness. While at the same time these doubts were there, he could not bring himself to think of anything less than the God Jehovah and Christ on the cross.

The very last thing a person who does not love God would do. Were it these words of the prophet? They shall call on my name and I will hear them.

Nothing could be truer than that. I will say it is my people and they want to hear that. And they shall say the Lord is my God and he wants to hear that.

[35 : 16] And as we are involved in any kind of trial or testing, we need God's grace to help us to come to him and to yield our lives to his all caring hand.

May he bless to us these thoughts. Let us pray. God in heaven, hear our prayers. Remember each and every one, especially those who are in the furnace of affliction.

Remember your people the world over and those whose faith is tried and tested repeatedly as witnesses to the truth that you are their God.

Watch over us each one, blessing our homes and our families. All who are near and dear to us, keep us with an eye to your glory, cleansing from sin. And now may grace, mercy and peace from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you all now and always.

Amen.