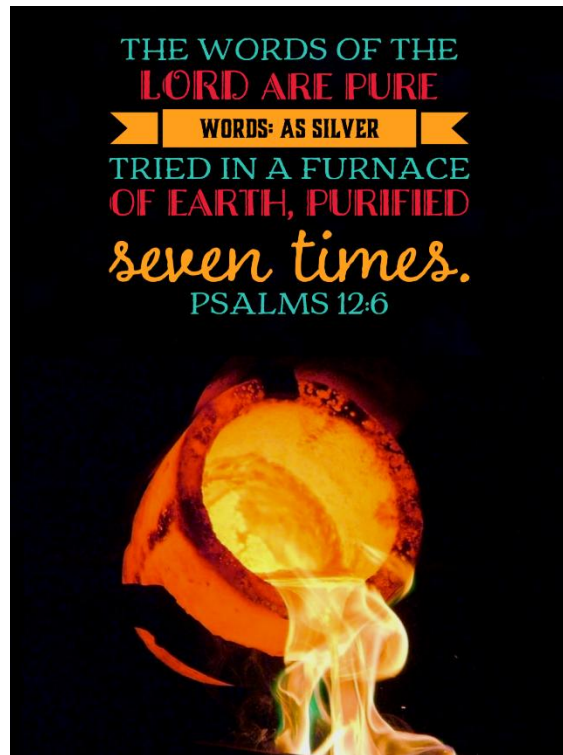


TRIED AS SILVER



INTRODUCTION

Are you presently going through any trials or tribulations? The car broke down just after the fridge stopped working. A close relative is unexpected suffering from an illness. You are experiencing financial difficulties due to the cost of living crisis and cannot see a way out of it. You are unsure about the future given all the bad news of wars and the increasing use of artificial intelligence systems in the workplace. Or do you feel that you have been disadvantaged at work because of your faith.

Two months ago, we were reminded that we are by no means on a peaceful sunset cruise but much more on a white water raft. Jesus brought about peace about between God and His people. But the peace between God and us does not translate into peace in and with the world. Jesus prepared us for a rocky road: “I have said these things to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation.” John 16:33. But you may say to yourself: “I expected that it was not going to be easy but I did not know it was going to be this hard!”.

Today’s reading from Psalm 66 deals with tribulation in the form of trials and testing. The Psalmist describes testing as silver is tried. Silver is an important narrative in the Bible and is referred to 320 times in the Bible. For a long time, pure silver was primarily used to mint coins, which was crucial to facilitate trade and it was used as a form of savings. Our older generation will be familiar with the saying: “selling off the family

silver”, which was used when families or states ran into financial difficulties and were forced to liquidate assets.

Silver was also used as mirrors for the very few who could afford it. Silver has a very high reflective quality across the visible spectrum and reflects 95% of light. It is used even today to make high quality mirrors in combination with glass. Apart from its use in jewellery, silver has a multitude of modern day applications in medicine, cars and industry. It is extensively used in purifying water, particularly to kill harmful bacteria and algae. The narrative of silver then becomes clearer to us to include the image of truth, holiness, honesty, endurance, long term value and a positive impact.

To be of value, silver must be purified. In Biblical times, crushed silver ore was heated on a porous bed of bone ash until it melted. The impurities and lead contained in the ore were absorbed into the bone ash and the molten silver was then drawn off. The process was repeated up to seven times, the number symbolic of completeness and perfection. This is why King David compares the Word of God to the purified silver: “The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.” Psalm 12:6.

In a similar way, for the believer to be of value to God and His Kingdom, a continuous process of purification is needed. The followers of Jesus are called to a life of holiness and “tried as silver” is used as a narrative for path of holiness and continued sanctification.

When we come to faith in Jesus, we are instantly regarded to be justified and to be righteous through the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is not earned and is a gift which we receive through grace and faith. But we are still very much filled with impurities. These stem from our own broken nature, from our natural tendency to turn to worldliness rather than to God and from the evil one who non-stop tries to lure us away from God.

It is crucial that we recognise that for the Christian there is a clear purpose of trials, testing and tribulations. It is easy to become despondent and think: “what is the point of being Christian if I suffer from the same or even worse troubles as non-Christians?”. The point is very clear: just as silver gains value when tried by being crushed and heated by fire until it melts down, we gain our value by going through experiences to the point of melt down. The process makes us more holy as we recognise the impurities in our lives and have it removed. It is meant to bring us closer to God, bring blessings and make us more valuable for our daily work in the Kingdom of God.

When molten silver has been drawn off, it is cooled down and returns to a solid state. The purified solid metal is then fashioned into the useful objects such as coins. We can take comfort that when we are going through crushing and melting experiences, these will not last for ever and the Lord will bring us back to a valuable solid state. The Psalmist sings about this: “For you, O God, have tested us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid a crushing burden on our backs; you let men ride

over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.” Ps 66:10-12.

Although it may not seem so in the moment, trials and tribulations are for a finite period. We have heard so many testimonies from our members who have faced trials and it all came to an end at some point. We also have the assurance that we will never be tested beyond what we are able to bear.

FRAMEWORK WHEN TRIED AS SILVER

Psalm 66 provides a valuable framework when we are being tried as silver. It is so easy to be caught up in a rabbit hole and a downward spiral when we are tried. Our natural tendency could be to feel sorry for ourselves, complain, grumble, blame others and God and focus all the attention and energy on ourselves. But Psalm 66 teaches us to take the attention from ourselves and focus on God and on others. The Apostle Peter dovetails with the Psalmist to enrich the framework given in Psalm 66:

Foremost, Glorify God with joy even at the lowest point of a trial	Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of His Name, give Him glorious praise! Ps 66:1, 2
Engage with the Lord	Say to God: "How awesome are your deeds". Ps 66:3 I cried to Him with my mouth and praise was on my tongue. Ps 66:17
Get out of the rabbit hole of our current trial and see the bigger picture	Come and see what God has done: He is awesome in His deeds toward the children of man. Ps 66:5 If you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. 1 Ptr 3:14
Faith monuments: recall what God has done in the past	He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There we did rejoice in Him, Who rules by His might forever, Whose eyes keep watch on the nations. Ps 66:6 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God. 1 Ptr 3:18
Diagnostic: identify the impurities. Repent, turn away from the world and sin and face towards God	If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened [to my prayer]. Ps 66:18 Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. 1 Ptr 3:10
Pray faithfully	God has listened; He has attended to the voice of my prayer. Ps 66:19 The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayer. 1 Ptr 3:12
Witness to others	Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what He has done for my soul. Ps 66:16 Have no fear of them [those causing suffering], nor be troubled, but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect. 1 Ptr 3:15
Give thanks to God	Blessed be God, because He has not rejected my prayer or removed His steadfast love from me! Ps

	66:20
If you promised something when tried, then do it!	I will perform my vows to You, that which my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble. Ps 66:14

WE NEVER WALK ALONE

We have such a privilege to have Jesus as our Saviour, our Brother and our Friend. He faced much harder trials and sufferings than what any of us will ever have to endure. He fully understands what it feels like to suffer and be tried as a human. And when He ascended to heaven to be our advocate and our intercessor, He did not abandon us on earth. We have the Helper, the Holy Spirit to be with each one of us everyday and in every trial and tribulation: "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, who the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to remembrance all that I have said to you." John 14:26

Through the strength we gain from the Holy Spirit, we too will be able sing with joy a Psalm or a hymn during our trials. May these words from the hymn Purify my heart (Mission Praise 921) be a true prayer for each one of us today:

Purify my heart,
Let me be as gold and precious silver;
Purify my heart,
Let me be as gold, pure gold.
Refiner's fire, my heart's one desire
Is to be holy,
Set apart for You, Lord.
I choose to be holy,
Set apart for You, my Master,
Ready to do Your will.

Purify my heart,
Cleanse me from within
And make me holy;
Purify my heart,
Cleanse me from my sin, deep within.

AMEN

Collect (Prayer before the readings): God our Redeemer, You have delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of Your Son; grant, that as by His death He has recalled us to life, so by His continual presence in us He may raise us to eternal joy, through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord, Who is alive and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit one God, now and for ever. Amen

Readings: Old Testament: Psalm 66

New Testament: 1 Peter 3:8 - 22

Gospel: John 14:15 - 27

Hymns:

1. 453 (Common Praise): Great is thy faithfulness
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTKlqmdfHSk>
2. 1267 (Mission Praise): Come people of the Risen King
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNIP8Sy23XE>
3. 1008 (Mission Praise): The Lord is my shepherd, I'll not want
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MG0>
4. 622 (Common Praise): Will you come and follow Me
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o469PRLdbHU>