

VOLUME ONE

**Comfort
From**

Meditations

**For
Such a
Time as This**

OLD TESTAMENT

NORTHWESTERN PUBLISHING HOUSE
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Scripture taken from the
HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION
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CONTENTS

Comfort for Troubled Lives

GOD PROVIDES STRENGTH FOR EACH DAY	1
DO HEROES FAINT?.....	2
THE FORTIFIER.....	3
OUR ONLY HOPE AND HELP	4
DON'T BE AFRAID	5
WHERE IS YOUR GOD?.....	6
IN HIM WE SHALL OVERCOME	7
THE PROTECTED LIFE.....	8
THE COMFORT OF GOD'S POWER.....	9
REASSURANCE FOR DOUBTING HEARTS.....	10
GOD'S TIME IS THE BEST TIME	11
QUESTIONING GOD'S WAYS.....	12

Faith Looks to the Future

IF A MAN DIES, WILL HE LIVE AGAIN?	13
LOOKING TO A HAPPY ENDING	14
FAITH THAT LOOKS TO THE FUTURE	15
STORM CLOUDS ON THE ROAD TO HEAVEN	16
JOY IN THE MIDST OF PROBLEMS.....	17
THE GOOD SHEPHERD LEADS US HOME.....	18
STRENGTH FOR GOD'S PEOPLE	19
AWAITING THE DAY OF VICTORY	20
THE MEANING OF CHRIST'S VICTORY FOR US	21
TRUE JOY HERE—TRUE JOY HEREAFTER.....	22
SAFE EVEN IN DEATH.....	23
SAFE IN GOD'S HANDS	24
HOME AT LAST	25

Lessons from the School of Faith

GOD IS A VERY PRESENT HELP	26
KEPT IN HIS CARE	27
OUR TENDER SHEPHERD'S CARE.....	28
ONE PLUS GOD!	29
THE FEAR OF FAILURE.....	30
COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS	31
WE ARE NOT ALONE.....	32
BLESS OUR GOING OUT WE PRAY.....	33
THE CRY OF THE SOUL HOMESICK FOR GOD	34
GOD'S GRACIOUS CONCERN FOR HIS PEOPLE	35
A DAY NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN	36

Living in Security

OUR LIFE IS SECURE FOR ETERNITY	37
GO WITH GOD	38
A LASTING PEACE.....	39
THE CHRISTIAN'S SAFETY NET	40
JOY WHEN YOU'RE DOWN AND OUT.....	41
NOTHING BUT JOY AND THE SOUNDS OF JOY.....	42
PRAISE THE LORD, O MY SOUL.....	43
FOLLOWING WHERE GOD LEADS.....	44
OUR ONE AND ONLY SOURCE OF SECURITY.....	45
WHOM DO YOU TRUST?.....	46
DO HEROES NEED HELP?.....	47

Conversations with God

THE BLESSED PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER.....	48
GREAT AND SMALL, TAKE THEM ALL TO THE LORD	49
GOD HEARS AND SEES HIS PEOPLE.....	50
IN GOD'S OWN TIME	51
HELP US IN OUR DAY OF TROUBLE	52
PRAYER IN A TRAGIC HOUR	53
NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS BE DONE	54

HEAR ME AND HASTEN TO HELP	55
INVITATION TO PRAYER	56
GOD’S PROMISE TO ANSWER PRAYER	57
PRAY WITH THANKFUL HEARTS	58
ACCEPTED BECAUSE HE WAS REJECTED	59

Tests of Faith

IN GRACE GOD SHAPES OUR LIVES	60
WHY ME?	61
TRIALS—PUNISHMENT OR OPPORTUNITY	62
“IT’S ME AGAINST THE WORLD, GOD”	63
THE LORD DISCIPLINES THOSE HE LOVES	64
WAIT IN HUMBLE SUBMISSION	65
THINGS DON’T JUST HAPPEN	66
ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD.....	67
A DETOUR FOR A PURPOSE	68
WAITING FOR DELIVERANCE	69

Hold Fast to the Word

REMEMBER AND APPLY GOD’S WORD	70
WORDS OF RESCUE	71
NOURISHED BY THE WORD.....	72
HIS WORD IS TRUTH.....	73
GOD’S WORD—THE SOURCE OF OUR JOY.....	74
HOLD FAST TO THE WORD	75
THE WORD IN NEED	76
THE ETERNAL WORD.....	77
THE WORD OF THE PROPHETS IS	
THE WORD OF THE LORD	78
FAITH GROUNDED IN THE WORD.....	79

This Is Our Father’s World

OUR FATHER PROVIDES FOR ALL	80
ALL DEPENDS ON OUR FATHER	81

OUR FATHER GOVERNS THE WORLD.....	82
OUR FATHER’S HEART	83
OUR FATHER’S MERCY	84
OUR FATHER’S FACE.....	85
OUR FATHER IS IN CONTROL	86
OUR FATHER’S POWER	87
OUR FATHER’S FAME ENDURES.....	88
OUR FATHER’S GLORY.....	89

This Is Our Wonderful God

HE WATCHES OVER US DAY AND NIGHT	90
GOD IS IN CONTROL	91
IN GOD’S HANDS.....	92
WHAT COMFORT—SIN FORGIVEN!	93
ALWAYS AT OUR SIDE	94
A NEVER-FAILING SOURCE OF STRENGTH.....	95
WITH GOD NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE.....	96
COMFORT LIKE ONLY A MOTHER CAN	97
GOD’S CONCERN FOR OUR SUFFERING.....	98
GOD DELIVERS HIS PEOPLE FROM HARM.....	99
GETTING WHAT WE DON’T DESERVE.....	100

EDITOR'S PREFACE

For Such a Time as This. The title of this three volume set of devotions comes from a thought that Mordecai brought to Queen Esther's attention during days of trial and tribulation for the Old Testament people of God. "For such a time as this," Mordecai suggested, God had placed Esther in a position of honor and influence so she could bring God's promised help to God's people (Esther 4:14).

For Such a Time as This. Days of trial and tribulation are no strangers to God's people today. Trials and troubles challenge us, spiritual enemies beset us, fiery trials scorch our faith, our own frailty and mortality frightens us, tragic losses mount, guilt plagues our consciences, personal problems put us on the verge of despair, and sometimes even daily life seems difficult and discouraging.

For Such a Time as This. In times such as these Christians of all ages have turned to God in prayer seeking his help, his promised deliverance, his comfort. They have turned to his Word to find what he has to say to them, and for the past thirty-three years *Meditations* has helped to lead Christians to that comfort of God's Word. Comfort in the fact that God knows who we are, where we are, what we are. Comfort in that God knows the story of our lives and has seen to it through Jesus Christ that it has a happy ending. Comfort in that Jesus has promised to guide us through every trouble, even through the valley of the shadow of death, until we safely stand with him at God's right hand.

For Such a Time as This. Now 300 of those messages of comfort have been selected for inclusion in these three volumes. Each volume contains 100 devotions based on texts chosen from the Gospels, the Epistles, and the Old Testament. Pastor Henry Paustian of Watertown, Wisconsin read through some 12,045 devotions and selected the best of these comfort meditations. Minor changes have been made in some of the original devotions to bring them into line with current procedures. All Scripture quotations and citations are from the NIV; capitalization and punctuation principles reflect current style; titles now are solely the themes of individual devotions instead of a weekly series.

For Such a time as This. Note that on the cover the letters "h-i-s" in the word **this** are printed in another color. That was done to remind all of us that no matter in what situation we may find ourselves, this is still **his**, God's time, that our lives and the events in our lives happen not by chance but under the providential direction of our Father in heaven. As the cover illustration further indicates, we are always safe in his hands.

May the reader find God's comfort in these devotions.

Lyle Albrecht

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31)

GOD PROVIDES STRENGTH FOR EACH DAY

“**G**od is not dead, nor doth he sleep,” said the poet. God does not even get tired, the Prophet Isaiah adds in these words of our text. God is not dead, so we may enjoy living in our Father’s world. God does not sleep, so we can lie down and rest in peace. He does not even get tired, so we can relax and let him run the universe!

He is strong and has strength to share. He will always provide today’s strength for today’s burdens and today’s efforts. Do not try to take tomorrow’s tensions and work, frustrations and anxiety, suffering and temptation today. Your God has not yet equipped you for tomorrow. You *can* cope today with today’s load, for He is at your side, bearing you up. Tomorrow you will be able to cope with tomorrow’s problems, because tomorrow He will give you the strength for that day.

Athletic coaches like to say: “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Isaiah speaks of a time when even the tough might not be able to go any further, a time when “Even the youths shall faint

and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.” By his prophet the Lord assures us here that even when the youngest and toughest and strongest can neither keep going nor get going, then those who trust in him will receive new strength from him. The Apostle Paul wrote of the experiences he had undergone for the Gospel’s sake. They were experiences that only a tough man could take and they would have stopped a man who lacked commitment. He wrote: “Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. When our outward life seems to be a struggle which we are losing, then God renews us inwardly. He comes in Word and Sacrament, in answer to prayer, as the gracious Father of his world. He helps and renews and bears us up on eagle’s wings.

The athletic coach tells his young men to reach down into themselves for reserves of strength and energy. The prophet invites us here to reach up to the LORD for a supply of his strength. He has it to spare and to share.

Almighty Father, give us each day the strength for that day. Amen.

“When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD.” (Jonah 2:7)

DO HEROES FAINT?

Heroes and heroines never quit! The more exhausted their bodies become, the more they seek within themselves for reserve strength. The body just won't give up because the spirit and mind push it to continue on. Observe the prize-fighter in the late rounds of the fight. Observe the farmer straining to clear the hay-field before the threatening storm arrives. This is the stuff of which heroes are made.

Jonah nearly quit. He just about gave up. The situation looked bleak. The waters of the sea surrounded him and closed in on him. Death seemed to encircle him, growing closer and closer with each breath. Any hope for escape dimmed with the passing moments. He was down in the dumps, giving up, fainting in his heart and soul. And what added to the feeling of weakness was the fact that he knew very well he had brought this whole situation upon himself.

But Jonah did not quit. He found new hope and strength. It was not in some inherent power which he suddenly remembered that he possessed. “I remembered the LORD,” Jonah tells us. The faith in his Lord which filled his heart

reminded him that he had a strength outside of himself, a strength he could look to and call on to sustain him and see him through his dilemma. Oh, how this remembering lifted up his heart and soul with new courage and strength! His faith prevented his fainting into despair.

Remember the Lord! What good and sound encouragement for us when we feel faint. “I can't do it,” is the frustration every heart feels at times. It may be in times of danger. It may be at times of physical exhaustion or times of worry. It may be when our sins weigh heavily on us. Remember the Lord! He has paid for those sins. He has carried the burden for us. In our Lord Jesus we have the blessed invitation from God, “Cast your cares on the LORD, and he will sustain you” (Psalm 55:22).

Remember the Lord! His strength is made perfect in us when we are most weak in body or soul. Even if our outward man, our body, grows weak under the stresses of life or the burdens of old age, we faint not because “inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). It is nourished and strengthened by God's mighty Word. Remember the Lord, and faint not!

Lord, help me remember you to find strength when I feel faint. Amen.

(The LORD) hath sent me . . . to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. (Isaiah 61:2,3)

THE FORTIFIER

“I will praise the Lord no matter what happens” (Psalm 34:1-LB). Would you give such unconditional praise to God? Could you ever say that? Do you praise the Lord even though you have poor health, are in serious financial difficulties or have family problems? It is almost unbelievable that a sensible person would make such a statement.

And yet David did. And David was no stranger to troubles. He not only had the Philistines after him because he killed Goliath; he also had to contend with the envy and hatred of King Saul. King Saul tried to kill him on several occasions, pursued him mercilessly, so that David had no peace. David lost several children—one a baby, the others when grown.

David was also no stranger to temptation and sin. He fell into the sins of pride, adultery, lying and murder—to name just a few. Read 1 and 2 Samuel if you are interested in more details of the life of this saint-sinner King of Israel.

How could he under the circumstances of his life say, “I will praise the LORD no matter what happens”? How was David able to rise above sin and sorrow to victory and greatness?

The answer is in today's text. It points out that Jesus is the Fortifier. To fortify means to strengthen. If you find yourself weak and helpless, in need of strength and aid, then turn to Jesus. We do not find strength in ourselves, nor in the world, but in Jesus Christ. We mourn over our sin, our guilt and our mistakes. Jesus forgives our sin, removes our guilt, corrects our mistakes and gives us the ability to cope with life and death and eternity.

David was very realistic in his faith. He wrote in Psalm 34: 18,19: “The LORD is close to those whose hearts are breaking; he rescues those who are humbly sorry for their sins. The good man does not escape all troubles—he has them too. But the LORD helps him in each and every one” (LB). Believe and rejoice in Jesus your Fortifier!

Jesus, thank you for the faith and strength to cope with life. Amen.

If the LORD had not been on our side—let Israel say—if the LORD had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive; the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, the raging waters would have swept us away. Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth. We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 124)

OUR ONLY HOPE AND HELP

“I just don't know where to turn any more for help.” Has this feeling ever crept into your heart? Have you ever felt that there was no help for you and your particular problem? Next time Satan puts this feeling into your heart, say confidently with the writer of Psalm 124, “Our help is in the name of the LORD.”

The children of Israel had faced great difficulties and powerful enemies. The psalmist compares these to wild beasts ready to devour them, to a flood of waters about to engulf them and to a snare with the noose tightening around them. He confesses, “If it had not been the LORD who was on our side,” we would have been overwhelmed. We were lost, hopelessly lost. But we found help with the Lord. Yes, “our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

The Lord is your only hope and help. When you feel that your spiritual enemies, the devil, the world and your

flesh are about to devour you; when you feel that the floodwaters of doubt and uncertainty are about to drown you; when you feel that the very noose of unbelief is tightening around you, then remember: “our help is in the name of the LORD.”

And if you wonder whether he is able to help, remember that he made heaven and earth. With him all things are possible. There is no problem so great that he can not solve it for you. There is no enemy so strong that he cannot defeat him. Even the greatest enemy of all, Satan, is not too strong for him. Christ has overcome the devil and the world, and he will help you overcome the temptations of your flesh.

So there is never cause for a Christian to doubt or to despair. Rather, when the minister reminds him in church every Sunday: “Our help is in the name of the LORD,” he will express his confidence and trust by responding, “Who made heaven and earth.”

**Who trusts in God, a strong abode In heaven and earth possesses;
Who looks in love to Christ above, No fear his heart oppresses.
In Thee alone, dear Lord, we own Sweet hope and consolation,
Our Shield from foes, our Balm for woes, Our great and sure Salvation.**

Amen.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. (Psalm 46:2,3)

DON'T BE AFRAID!

To feel helpless is frightening. To fear for one's life is terrible. This psalm reminds us of such feelings in a striking way: the ground giving way beneath our feet, massive mountains quaking and toppling around us, plunging into the deepest part of the sea as the waters crash and roll together with earth-shattering force. The natural catastrophes of earth—earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, etc. remind us of how easily earthly security can give way to overwhelming disaster.

Even in an otherwise peaceful world, trouble may come—a severe accident, an illness, the loss of a family member or the loss of our job or home. On our own we are vulnerable and helpless in the face of evil. With dangers and trouble all around us, what hope can the Bible offer?

In this world we will have trouble. But in Christ we have a way through the evils of life, through its troubles and trials. God is our refuge and strength. Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we fear no evil, for our Good Shepherd is with us, leading the way. His word sets our hearts at ease as we entrust ourselves and all things into his almighty care. His grace restores our lives.

We can best cope with hard times by walking with Jesus every day. We draw courage and comfort from his Word. We call for his help in prayer. We learn to share our burdens with Christian friends, and in turn help and encourage others. Together as a church and on our own as individuals, we lay down every care at our Father's throne of grace.

How often God's angels told believers in the past, "Fear not! Don't be afraid!" God is our refuge. The Holy Spirit who first brought us to trust in Jesus preserves our faith through God's Word and sacraments. This heavenly assurance of peace with God sets us free from the shame and frustrations of sin. It moves us to trust fearlessly in God even in the midst of trouble. For we know that all things work together for the good of those who love God. We fix our eyes on Jesus, through whom we have become citizens of an eternal home which will never be lost or destroyed.

Even when the end of this world arrives, and the earth gives way to the fire of the judgment, we need not fear. For out of its destruction, we will arise with joy to live with our faithful Savior forever.

Thank you, Lord, for delivering me from every evil. Amen.

They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed. (Psalm 22:5)

WHERE IS YOUR GOD?

Disappointments, failures, tragedies make life hard, trying and bitter. Does God really care when we are in trouble? “Where is your God?” says the man of the world as misfortune and sorrow heap themselves on believers.

Trials and troubles seem to tumble in from all sides, making life difficult and discouraging. At times even the sinful heart of the Christian anxiously asks, “Where is God? Has he forgotten me?”

As the believer stands at the deathbed of a dear child and then at the grave, the thought surges through the mind: Does God really love me? As the Christian has one prop after another pulled out from under him, he asks: Has God turned from me?

See all the misery, loneliness, distress and destruction in the world! And sometimes it seems as though the Christian gets a double portion of it all. Does God care? Is he really my God?

“Where is your God?” There he hangs on Calvary’s cross, dying because he cares. There Jesus shed his blood because he loves us and does not want us to perish. If God did not

spare his own Son, but gave him into death to make us heirs of life eternal, then he certainly does care as we go through life. He will not leave us hopeless or helpless. Underneath are the everlasting arms of God, which will not let us fall.

When it comes right down to it, we really deserve nothing good at all from God. We deserve “nothing but punishment,” as we confess every Sunday. Nevertheless, he abundantly pardons us through Christ. Jesus’ blood blots out even the foulest deed. There is peace, hope and joy in Christ crucified. God will not accuse us or close the door on us, but will finally deliver our souls from death and hell.

So we can live joyfully through each day, knowing that our God will sustain us. We are not stumbling along on an aimless road, but in a direction that God wills to take us for our good. So we can sleep in safety each night under the shadow of his wings. The Lord is the Keeper of our body and the Lover of our souls. And he is the Ruler of the universe. We will never be disappointed for having put our trust in him.

Dearest Savior, teach me to appreciate your sacrifice on the cross. Remove all thoughts of rebellion and dissatisfaction from my heart and help me confess that your will is wiser than mine. In every problem, let your presence calm my spirit. Help me to know and to understand that you love me with an everlasting love. Amen.

But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:31)

IN HIM WE SHALL OVERCOME

The problems that faced Israel in Isaiah's day were very much like those we face today. There was tension between nations with the ever-present possibility of war. The influence of pagan religion was disturbing Israel. Economic, social, political and religious differences are equally disruptive today. Include also the personal difficulties of making a living, trying to stay healthy and out of trouble, and putting forth all the emotional energy needed to stay on good terms with family, neighbors and fellow workers. Add up all the trying and difficult problems of life, and you have all the ingredients for being really tired—dead tired. It is no wonder that many people seek escape at some weekend retreat. Some divert their attention from worries through sports activities. Others may seek escape in drugs and alcohol.

Sad to say, most people tend to look in the wrong direction for relief from the sin-included tensions of life. That is why tensions are growing, not lessening. Isaiah has a solution for this sorry situation. He promises that those who wait upon the Lord,

that is, those who believe in God's power to deliver us from any and all difficulty, shall be blessed with renewed strength. He uses an illustration from nature to picture God's help. As effortlessly as an eagle spreads its wings and lets currents of air lift it up to lofty heights, so the believer will be lifted up above all his problems, especially the problems of sin. He who trusts in God's salvation in Christ will "run" through life and not be weary. He will walk the walk of life with all its responsibilities and tensions and not grow faint.

Does all this sound too good to be true? Not to the Christian who has learned with St. Paul that he can do all things through Christ, who strengthens him. For that reason it is a distinct privilege and pleasure for us to go to church to worship our God and Savior, to sing of his blessings and to praise his holy name. And we eagerly listen to his Gospel, which assures us that in Christ God has cleansed us of our sin; in Christ we have overcome death and damnation.

**Thy Word doth deeply move the heart,
Thy Word doth perfect health impart,
Thy Word my soul with joy doth bless,
Thy Word brings peace and happiness. Amen.**

But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. (Isaiah 43:1,2)

THE PROTECTED LIFE

Famous persons and public officials are not the only people exposed to danger. Every one of us faces the possibility of injury, sickness and death. When we Christians experience such things in our lives, we may be troubled as to whether the Lord really is protecting us. Luther says in the explanation to the First Article that God is “defending me against all danger, and guarding and protecting me from all evil.” If the Lord is at our side, how can evil happen to us?

This is not a new question. It was often asked by the people of Israel. Many of the psalms raise questions about the Lord’s care and concern for his people. What was God’s answer to Israel? What is his answer to us?

Public figures often have their body guards. Candidates for the presidency are protected by the secret service. Yet we know from experience that there is no foolproof protection. If someone is really determined to hurt or harm another person, he will at times be successful despite all protective efforts.

The words of Isaiah in our text are addressed to the people of Israel who are suffering in the Babylonian captivity. This is a word from the Lord to a nation created, redeemed and called by him. This is a word from the Lord to people who belong totally to him.

What is his promise? He does not say they will not go through any “waters” or walk through any “fire.” Water and fire are symbols of the dangers and evil surrounding people. Fire is often used as a symbol for punishment and destruction. The Lord does allow trouble to come to us. We are exposed to dangers, to injury, to sickness, to death.

Yet the Lord protects us by bringing us through these dangers and troubles. He brings us through the deep waters of earthly trials and tribulations. The Lord says to his own dear children, “I will be with you. You will not drown in the deep waters. You will not be scorched by the fire.” With the Lord walking at our side, we will reach the goal of our journey unharmed.

Gracious Savior, comfort me with the assurance that you will be with me in all danger, trouble and sickness. Amen.

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. (1 Chronicles 29:11)

THE COMFORT OF GOD'S POWER

A “weather rock” hangs by a rope from a tripod along a road on Washington Island in Lake Michigan. A sign is tacked up next to the “weather rock.” It tells how to use the rock to tell the weather. If the rock is wet, it is raining. If the rock feels cold, it is cold. If the rock is white, it is snowing. The sign continues on and on and at the end it reads, “The wonderful thing about this ‘weather rock’ is that it is not affected by the weather.” The implication is that we human beings are unlike the rock. We are affected by the weather and by our environment and by all of God’s creation.

Because we in this world are affected by cold and heat, prosperity and disaster, these words of 1 Chronicles are so comforting: “Everything in heaven and earth is yours.” God is the creator of all things. Everything that exists with his knowledge and by his creation. Because God loves us, all things created are for our good.

But sin has corrupted all things. Sin has ruined the goodness of

God’s creation. But sin has not destroyed God’s love for all people. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

God loves us. He cares for us. He knows that we are not “weather rocks” unaffected by the storms and troubles of this life. Therefore God gives us his promises found in his Word: “In all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28). “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

These are the promises of the almighty God who created all things and who governs all things. He loves us. We praise our almighty God for the comfort of his power which he uses out of love for our eternal good. “Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.”

O Lord, since all things are yours, protect us in this sinful world in your love and mercy by your great power. Amen.

Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" (Genesis 17:17) Sarah . . . bore a son . . . at the very time God had promised him. . . . Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." (Genesis 21:2,6)

REASSURANCE FOR DOUBTING HEARTS

This laughter of Sarah and Abraham is the same joy and happiness that lives in our hearts when we know that God's promises are sure and that his promises apply to us. We rejoice when we finally come to see that even during our times of trouble and doubt God was with us to take care of things and make them work out for our good.

This joy and laughter are a response that comes from a faith that has just been uplifted by God's repeated promises and their fulfillment. In Abraham's case his faith came to rejoice in God's promises even before their fulfillment. Sarah's joy was complete when she saw that God truly did bring to pass everything he had promised.

We can also laugh with Sarah when we recognize that this whole story can serve to reassure our doubting hearts. It can move us to reason, "If God was faithful to his promise to Abraham and Sarah, will he not also be faithful to the promises he has made to us in his Word?"

Here God performed a mighty miracle to keep the promise of the Savior. He had promised the Savior of the world was to come from the family of Abraham and Isaac. If Isaac had not been born, that family line would have ended and along with it the promise of a Savior. If it took a miracle to bring this important child to these two old people, then God would provide the miracle.

If 2,000 years later it would take a miracle for Jesus to be born of a virgin, then God would provide another miracle. If it would even be necessary for God to leave heaven to come to earth to save mankind, then this is what God would do. He did, and Jesus who is God came to earth for our salvation.

Jesus is the reason we can laugh and sing for joy. Jesus is the reason the fear of death and hell has been replaced with joy and hope. God let nothing stop him from bringing the Savior into the world. Let us rejoice in our Savior. He wishes the laughter of faith to be found in our home.

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God, for he hath clothed me with garments of salvation, he hath covered with the robe of righteousness. Amen.

For men are not cast off by the LORD forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. (Lamentations 3:31,32)

GOD'S TIME IS THE BEST TIME

“How long will this suffering continue?” This is a question which many a Christian has asked during periods of severe testing. And yet his very suffering can serve as a source of real comfort to him. Scripture makes this point repeatedly. The Bible is lined with comforting passages which become especially precious to those who are experiencing the chastening rod of God. Job, for example, who endured afflictions far greater than any we will ever have to bear, was comforted by the knowledge that, “When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). The Apostle Paul, who experienced numerous tribulations himself, encourages us to “rejoice in our sufferings,” because “suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3,4).

So leave everything up to the Lord! His time is the best time when it comes to bestowing blessings of joy as well as blessings of affliction.

The psalmist writes, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O LORD, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are

feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the LORD more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins” (Psalm 130).

When we remember that the Lord “will have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies,” our thoughts include, but also soar above, the many temporal blessings which we sinners receive from him in this world of sin. We fix our gaze upon the compassionate Christ, who bestows eternal blessings on those who are oppressed by sin and guilt—for he has removed our sin and guilt and the cause of all suffering. In him we have conquered sin and death and Satan and hell.

When we are reminded by the theme for today that “God’s time is the best time,” how can we forget that best “time” of all, the “fullness of the time” when God sent forth his Son to redeem the world! The redemptive work of this Son of God makes it easy for us to endure the tribulations of life on earth, for we look ahead in confident faith to the endless bliss of heaven!

To you, O God and Savior, we give all praise and honor. Amen.