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The Tree That Sweetens Bitter Waters

"And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet." — Exodus 15:25

Summary:

Life brings bitter waters, but faith applies Christ's cross and makes affliction bearable and spiritually profitable. Christ shared suffering, yet his lifelong, foreknown sorrows exceeded ours. Though divine and perfectly innocent, he suffered for us. His passion gives believers peace with God, a sympathetic High Priest, an example for endurance, and the Spirit's help. Because his cross led to glory, those who suffer with him may confidently hope to be glorified with him.

Outline:

1. **Life contains bitter waters**
   - Personal and shared troubles are painful, yet they can be endured with faith.
2. **The cross changes our experience of sorrow**
   - Looking to Christ makes losses spiritually fruitful and complaints less bitter.
3. **Christ's sufferings were greater than ours**
   - His sorrows were lifelong, comprehensive, foreknown, and beyond expression.
4. **The innocent Saviour suffered for us**
   - His humiliation was undeserved and secured forgiveness, peace, and access to God.
5. **His suffering supplies help and hope**
   - Christ sympathizes, gives an example and the Spirit, and leads his people to glory.

Text

There is no need to ask what kind of tree Moses used or whether the wood's effect was natural or miraculous; a miracle is more likely. Nor need we decide whether the event was meant as a direct gospel type. We can use it to illustrate the apostle's counsel: "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Like Israel, we journey through a wilderness, facing bitter waters—the personal and shared troubles of life. Though painful, they can be made bearable. We can learn to endure affliction, submit to it, and even glory in tribulation.

How can this happen? The secret is the cross of Christ:

"The Cross, on which the Saviour died,
And conquered for his saints,
This is the tree, by faith applied,
That sweetens all complaints."

Thousands have known this blessing: reflecting on Christ's sorrows eases their own. By faith, they behold the cross, gain through loss, and find sweetness in bitterness. The Saviour's sufferings comfort us by reminding us that others have endured the same trials. Sorrow seems most threatening when we feel alone, but temptation is common to humanity, and believers worldwide share these afflictions.

The Lord chastens those he loves, even his greatest servants. His beloved Son, in whom he delighted, suffered too. Shall we fear sharing in his sufferings?

There is comfort in both the reality and greatness of Christ's suffering. We exaggerate our trials, but he could say, "Behold,

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and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." Our griefs ease; his lasted throughout life. Ours do not touch every capacity; he was a man of sorrows. We do not fully foresee our suffering; he knew it all beforehand, enduring it first in anticipation, then in reality.

No tongue can express or mind conceive what he bore when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, and his sweat fell like great drops of blood.

We must remember the sufferer's dignity. Loss hurts more deeply after greatness; Job's former honour intensified later insults. Yet Jesus, Lord of all and worshipped by angels, was despised and rejected—struck, scourged, spat upon, and mocked by rulers, soldiers, crowds, and criminals. Who are we beside him? We are grounded in dust. It is divine condescension that God deals with us at all, even through correction; yet the Lord of glory willingly endured the deepest humiliation.

Great people may deserve humiliation, and sin makes our suffering just. Even faithful believers cannot be surprised by affliction, recalling their years without God and later failures. Aaron held his peace in terrible loss; David submitted to chastening for his sin; and the Church confesses, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him."

Christ had done nothing wrong: he was harmless, holy, and separate from sinners. He could challenge his enemies, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Yet the innocent one suffered, led like a lamb to slaughter—for us alone. What better comfort than the benefits of his passion? His atoning sacrifice frees us from condemnation, makes peace with God, and grants access to

him. For those in Christ, trials hold no divine wrath; they express a Father's care, and death's bitterness is past.

He is also a sympathetic Friend, touched by our weaknesses through experience. Having suffered temptation himself, he can help those who are tempted.

He is our Example in trials, showing us how to act and feel. He suffered for us, leaving a pattern to follow, and through his death secured the Spirit's help for his people. Without the Spirit, we would fail, but Christ's grace is sufficient.

Remember the outcome: for the joy ahead, he endured the cross, scorned its shame, and sat at God's right hand. Our sorrows will likewise end in glory. "If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him." Those who suffer with Christ will be glorified with him.

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, Morning and Evening Exercises (January 31, Morning), first published in 1854.