

“Thy Way, Not Mine O Lord.”

Text: 1 Cor 13:12

Suggested Hymns:

416, 354, 452, 414, 408

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Corinthians 13:12, ¹² *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We are mystified by the mysterious ways of God. We cannot fathom the deep things of His Godhead, nor unravel His unsearchable providences. God Himself has told us in Isaiah 55:8–9, ⁸ *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.* ⁹ *“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

Yet man is so perverse in his sinful pride that he will criticise God’s holy Word and decry, and even denounce His sovereign dispensations. May God in His mercy preserve us from such arrogance.

Last Sunday we heard of the buffetings of Satan which St. Paul had to endure and which filled him with great distress and alarm. Again and again he cried to the Lord for deliverance from this terrible affliction.

We can imagine that he said within himself many a time: *“Why should this be? Here I am devoting my life to the service of my Lord Jesus Christ. I had planned and hoped for great victories for Christ. I had planned to proclaim the blessed message of salvation in every part of the world, to every nation.*

But here I am afflicted. I cannot work as I want to. Who is in charge of things anyway? God or Satan? If God governs and rules all things, then why does this happen to me, His servant?”

Finally, he received this answer from the Lord, as we are told in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*”

His conclusion was, *Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.* That answer served to strengthen and ground him in a faith that relied completely on God’s grace and help.

Let us remember this answer of our Lord when Satan wants to assail us with his fiery darts of doubt and unbelief, or even with blasphemous thoughts that fill a Christian soul with horror and dismay.

Although we may not always understand the ways of God, let us calmly trust in Him, secure in the knowledge that all things work together for good to those who love Him. We walk by faith, not by sight. But that faith has God’s Word to lean upon, the Word of Him who cannot lie and whose love for the world is sealed by His gift of His only begotten Son.

Surely, there is comfort, divine comfort, in the fact that all of these incomprehensible dispensations come from Jesus who loved us unto death and that they can never mean our harm, but are sent only for our temporal and eternal good.

Even though we cannot always comprehend, or much less explain them, they are always done in love by God who numbers the very hairs of our head.¹

In our text our thoughts are directed forward to the day when we shall understand. “*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*” May this fact always comfort and satisfy us.

Let us patiently and prayerfully wait for that day. In the meantime we say with the hymnist, *Belovèd, it is well: God’s ways are always right, And perfect love is o’er them all, Though far above our sight.*²

Let us consider, *Thy Way, Not Mine O Lord.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Thy Way, Not Mine O Lord

St. Paul, this great Apostle of Jesus Christ, did not always know, did not possess the adequate knowledge to solve every problem that confronted him. This faithful servant of the Lord was often perplexed.

The Lord's way and words often seemed strange and inexplicable to him. His short-sighted understanding made it practically impossible for him to understand why his Master did this, or why He did not do otherwise; why He did not prevent this or that, when it was in His power to do so.

At times it seemed to him as though the forces of evil were in control. He, the Apostle, was being hampered and hindered in his work for the Lord at every turn. It just did not seem right. However, he learned through faith and experience that the Lord does all things well, that He knows what is best at all times.

That there are always many problems that children of God cannot solve is verified by God's people of every age. Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his only son, Isaac.

Job, an upright man who feared God and shunned evil, is robbed in one night of all his children, his earthly possessions are taken from him, and he himself is smitten with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.³

Joseph is torn from his father's side and sold into Egypt, there to languish for many years as a slave. Unjustly accused by Potiphar's wife, he is cast into prison.

David, a man after the heart of God, is persecuted by Saul, who repeatedly tried to kill him. Even his own son Absalom instigated a rebellion against him, and he had to flee.

And as God deals in mysterious ways with individuals, so also He deals with entire nations. His chosen people of Israel languish for centuries in bondage in Egypt. Forty weary years of wandering in the wilderness follow, before it is permitted to enter the Promised Land. Truly, God's ways are past finding out. His thoughts are not our thoughts; His ways are not our ways. We cannot see the why and for what reason.

The same experience is ours today. We cannot understand why God often lets His children weep, while the ungodly laugh and are prosperous. We cannot

understand why a child of God spends a lifetime in suffering and sickness, while another enjoys continued health.

We cannot understand why one who is aged, weak, and weary of life, and longs for the hour of his deliverance from all evil, lingers on, while another is quickly removed from this vale of tears and transferred into the eternal bliss of heaven.

We cannot understand why at times Christian parents who have brought up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, who have always given them a good example to follow, must experience nothing but sorrow and heartache because of their children, while unbelieving parents, who never bothered about the welfare of their children's souls, experience joy and pleasure in them.

We cannot understand why a Christian often seemingly gets nowhere in spite of his faithful efforts and conscientious work, while children of the world gain wealth and power.

But why cite more examples? We all know and have experienced it that in this life there is so much that is inexplicable and beyond our understanding.

Therefore many a believing soul questions: "*Why does God deal with me in such mysterious ways?*" And no satisfactory answer is given to us in this world. We know but in part. But this we know from the Word of God: all of God's dealings with us, His children, are just, and they are ways of love and mercy.

We read in Revelation 15:3, "***Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!***"

And St. Paul tells us in Romans 8:28, ²⁸ ***And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*** Indeed as the hymnist wrote:⁴

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never-failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.

Since we cannot always understand God's mysterious ways and dealings with His children, let us not murmur and complain, but be satisfied with God's dealings and willingly submit to His guidance and providence. In His own good time He will reveal to us the glorious purpose behind it all.

True, we may have to experience all manner of inconvenience and discomfort, experiences that seem unpleasant. But tell me, where is the harm in this? In all His dealings with us God has in view *“receiving the end of your faith — the salvation of your souls.”*⁵

And even here in this world and present life the Lord sometimes permits His children to know and understand the why of His dealings with them. Israel experienced terrible oppression in Egypt, but by this God was training His people, and when His hour had come and His purpose had been accomplished, He freed His people from the bondage.

Aged Jacob mourns over his young son Joseph, thinking that he is dead. But Joseph is alive and on his way to great honours. And when the aged father at last is brought down to Egypt, the land of plenty, and sees his son, his heart bounds for joy.

Mary Magdalene comes to the sepulchre on the Easter morning to anoint the body of her Lord. She finds it empty and weeps, thinking that His enemies have come and stolen away the precious remains. Then she sees a man standing near her. He looks like a gardener; and she asks him to help her find the Master's body. His only answer is the single word “Mary” in the old familiar voice. She knew Him then, and her heart rejoiced, even though she had come to the grave bowed down with unutterable grief.

And think of the disciples of our Lord. How different everything that Jesus had done and said appeared to them after the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Then, enlightened by the Spirit of God, they understood and saw clearly much of what before had been dark to them.

Remember how often the Lord had to chide them for their lack of understanding. Remember how the disciples tried to discourage Jesus and keep

Him from going to Jerusalem when He told them that He must suffer and die. They thought only of His suffering and death. They could not understand the necessity of His Passion.

But when their Lord had accomplished the redemption of all men by His crucifixion and death, when He had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven and given them the Comforter, who taught them all things, then they understood and saw what before they had not understood and seen. Then they praised and glorified their Master for all He had done to redeem the world.

Now their faith, which before was often weak and uncertain, had become strong and certain. Now these men, who before had been wavering and weak and afraid, went out and courageously faced a pagan world and proclaimed the message of the crucified Redeemer.

Let us short-sighted mortals learn to trust God in all His dealings. After all, our life here in this world is not the end, but only the beginning of our existence.

Here we are, so to say, but going to primary school, learning the first fundamental and elementary truths concerning God's counsels. Here we see but through a glass, darkly; here we know but in part. Can a child in the first grade in school grasp and understand all the intricacies of higher mathematics?

But as the years go on, the child in school gains understanding and knowledge. And by the grace of God we, too, in the course of years do make some progress in our understanding and knowledge of God's counsel.

As we grow older and gain experience, we begin to see more and more clearly that the seemingly aimless and planless ways of God have a definite end in view, and that they all come from and converge in the love of our God and Father.

Our faith and trust in God is strengthened through trial and testing. We learn to look beyond death and the grave. We learn to rejoice more and more in the prospect of the heavenly glories which shall be ours.

And even though the ways of God are frequently past finding out and beyond understanding, we learn to say: *"What of it? We have a loving Father in heaven, who means us no harm or evil; who has only our good, our eternal good in*

mind.” Our Father’s heart goes out to us always in mercy and loving-kindness. And in trusting faith we submit to Him.

And if at times we are tempted to murmur and complain and say: “*Why is it? I cannot understand,*” let us turn our eyes to that midnight scene in Gethsemane where our Saviour is kneeling in nameless agony, bearing the burden of all the sins of all men, seeing all the suffering that he was to endure. He cried out in anguish, just as we often do today. But remember, he added: “*Not My will, Father, but Thine, be done.*”⁶

If therefore, in trust and submission to God’s counsel and ways, we go on from day to day, we shall see something of this ripening for heaven in the days of darkness: a greater patience, a more perfect trust, and longing and desire for heaven.

So let us have faith in God. By this we do not mean such a faith as even worldlings have, that God rules over the world in some vague way and means everything for the best. No, such a faith would only leave us wringing our hands in despair when dark hours come.

Rather, our faith is based on the promises of God who is the Truth. Our faith holds that the Son of God is my Lord, who has redeemed me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, that I might be a child of God and an heir of His glory and blessedness in heaven.

Such a faith will carry me safely through all the way. It will shield me against the assaults of the Evil One. It will uphold me in all trials and temptations. It will give me peace in the days of trouble, so that I learn to be still and wait upon the Lord.

In that faith I can say with the Psalmist, as written in Psalm 42:11, *“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.*”

A wonderful promise is held out to us: that beyond death there awaits us the heavenly glory and blessedness. His Word pledges this as the end and goal of our Christian pilgrimage. For this purpose the Son of God came down from heaven for us men and for our salvation. For this He ascended up from earth to heaven, “*to prepare a place for us.*”⁷

In trusting faith we ponder what is revealed to us and rejoice that some day we shall see through Christ the untold and unguessed glories of that world to come. We know that there we shall see Him as He is, face to face; and when He shall appear, we shall be like Him.

As our text says, *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matt 10:30

² Hymn 408

³ Job 2:7

⁴ Hymn 414

⁵ 1 Peter 1:9

⁶ Luke 22:42

⁷ John 14:2