

"FROM A DULL STONE TO A SPARKLING DIAMOND"

TEXT: Psalm 119:67,71,75

THESIS: To show that things of value often must go thru a purging process.

INTRO.: A. Most of us are aware that things of value must often go thru a purging or refining process to increase their value. Special sand must go thru intense heat before it becomes glittering glass. Unsightly trees become beautiful cabinetry after being chopped down, making a trip to the sawmill & being diligently worked on by the carpenter. But before that most pampered & admired rock on the block ends up on the bride-to-be's finger, it must be transformed **"FROM A DULL STONE TO A SPARKLING DIAMOND."** Behind the brilliance of that beautiful ring is a long history of obscure & difficult development. After ages of formation in the earth, it is uncovered in a South African mine an unimpressive, dull, roughly shaped stone. It comes into the hands of someone who recognizes its potential beauty & with the wisdom to bring out its splendor. The crude stone is studied, measured, & split. Then it is cut & polished to eliminate the flaws & discolorations & given facets to reflect the light.

B. This is very much like the "dull stone" of the new Christian. He too has been hidden away & when finally brought to light by the Gospel is presented to the Master Diamond Cutter who sees his potential & begins the process of cutting away the imperfections & chipping away the flaws, creating facets which will reflect His glory. It is often a lengthy & painful process & most of the original stone is gone & only that which can reflect the Light of the Savior remains.

I. CUTTING AWAY THE SIN: v.67 ***(THE FACET OF HEALTH)***

A. Hurts That Heal:

ILLUS.: Just as the diamond cutter only cuts away that which will enhance the stones brilliance & beauty, our Lord only cuts away that which will bring healing in the believer. Our afflictions are to help & heal us, not to hurt us.

1. First comes confession: *"...I went astray"*

- a. The Psalmist knew that his affliction was, in this case, a result of his sin.
- b. These afflictions are painful, never joyful; they are not things bestowed, but things taken away.
- c. The healing that accompanies these afflictions cannot begin until confession begins.

2. Next comes conversion: *"Before I was afflicted I went astray."*

- a. The Psalmist knew that it was his affliction which brought him to God.
- b. This "conversion" is not salvation, but repentance & "coming home."

3. Then comes consecration: *"but NOW I have kept thy Word..."*

- a. Affliction which brings confession, conversion & consecration has completed its work.
- b. If our affliction brings us to the place where we consciously keep God's Word, we are back where we belong as His children.

ILLUS.: Instead of the Psalmist getting bitter over his affliction & correction, he recognizes the goodness of God in it all. He doesn't blame God, he praises Him. He exclaims: *"Thou art good, and doest good...!"* The child of God finds goodness in affliction if he doesn't rebel against it.

Are you in the vise of God & is He chipping away at your sin? It is painful but it is praiseworthy! It may hurt, but it will help. It may wound, but it will bring health. It may seem bad, but God is good! We may have done bad, but He *"doest good!"* The wicked may have robbed the Psalmist of a great deal (v.61), but they couldn't steal his Bible: he had it in his heart. v.69 In time of affliction he was able to recall God's words. He suits the correction to the occasion; He matches the discipline to the deed.

II. CUTTING AWAY THE PRIDE: v.71 (cf. v.69,70) ***(THE FACET OF HUMILITY)***

A. Hurts That Help:

ILLUS.: In the royal ceremony of bestowing knighthood, the man kneels before his sovereign & gladly endures the humility of being struck w/a stinging blow from the flat side of the King's sword, for he knows

that when he rises he will stand to his feet a nobleman. So it is when we kneel in God's presence & He smites us w/affliction to cut away our pride. When we rise from the affliction our pride will have been dealt a deathblow.

1. In our flesh we may feel we know what is best for us.
2. When the afflictions come, we humbly confess that God's Word is best.
3. The Psalmist declares that his afflictions were good & taught Him God's statutes.

ILLUS.: The Prodigal Son had no thought of returning to his father's house until he had been humbled by adversity. Hagar was haughty under Abraham's roof & despised by Sarah, but in the wilderness she was meek & lowly. Manasseh lived fast & loose in Jerusalem, but when he was bound in chains in a Babylonian prison, his heart turned to seek the Lord.

QUOTE: C. H. Spurgeon: "Stars may be seen from the bottom of a deep well that cannot be seen from the top of a mountain; so many things learned in adversity which the prosperous man dreams not of. We need affliction as the trees need winter, that we may collect sap & nourishment for future blossoms & fruit. Sorrow is as necessary for the soul as medicine is to the body. 'The path of sorrow, & that path alone, leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.'"

4. Adversity & affliction will help us toward reaching our goal of Christlikeness.

ILLUS.: In a Florida boot camp soldiers received some "Gator Aid" to help them reach their goals. In the obstacle course was a pond they were to swing across. Under the blazing sun the pool looked so inviting that few of them made it completely across. But one young lieutenant placed a 15 ft. long alligator in the pond. They suddenly received new stamina to swing the complete distance...& then some. We often need an incentive to reach our goal of Christlikeness & it often includes the "alligator" of affliction!

POEM: "Though I am His sheep, I am still prone to stray; So Jesus in love sends afflictions my way. The lessons which come in that school of deep pain, Will teach me to follow my Lord once again."

ILLUS.: It is in the Diamond Cutter's hands that we have our pride chiseled away & we can state w/the Psalmist: ***"The Law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of silver & gold."*** v.72

III. CUTTING AWAY THE DOUBT: (THE FACET OF HOPEFULNESS)

A. Hurts That Bring Hope: v.75

1. There are two kinds of "judgments:" the judgments of God's mouth & the judgments of God's hand; one is for instruction, the other for correction.
2. The Psalmist has learned that God's judgments for correction are designed to turn **"A DULL STONE INTO A SPARKLING DIAMOND."**
3. He had learned "thru it all" to "trust in Jesus" & to "trust in God."
4. He knew now that God's afflictions come from a loving Father, not a self-serving Judge.

5. His afflictions gave him faith that God is always right.

QUOTE: Ruckman: "We know that God is right, even when we don't agree w/Him."

ILLUS.: Scientists know that hurricanes are more helpful than harmful. They maintain a balance in nature. With winds up to 150 mph, torrential rains, glaring lightning, & rumbling thunder, they are awesome, but they dissipate the oppressive heat which builds up at the equator. They also provide much needed rain for N. & S. America.

The afflictions of God's people also produce temporary pain, but permanent benefit. When properly seen, they build character & trust in the loving God who sends them. (My wife suffered for the last 10-12 years of her life, but because God is good I know they were not in vain and I want to stand beside her at the Judgement Seat to pick up the rewards she cannot carry. She never quit her ministries in serving the Savior in spite of her pain and rarely ever missed a church service.)

POEM: "If God had kept me from all pain, I might have lived my life in vain;
But through my trials I've come to see the greatness of His love for me."

6. By their very nature afflictions are not designed for our pleasure, but they are designed for our profit.

ILLUS.: The concluding thoughts of the Psalmist in the light of all God's cutting to turn "**DULL STONES INTO SPARKLING DIAMONDS**" is that all his former doubts are dissipated & he says that his afflictions are a part of God's "*merciful kindness*" and for his "*comfort*." v.76

CONCL.: In the diamond cutting process for the believer the Lord is **cutting away the sin, the pride & the doubt** which plagues us & is turning **"DULL STONES INTO SPARKLING DIAMONDS."** He wants to place us on display one day when He makes up His jewels. In this chipping process we are becoming more & more like His Son. As the *dull stone* should not rebel against the diamond cutter for the sharp blows which are designed to turn it into a *sparkling diamond*, neither should the saint rebel against the Lord Who is chipping away at anything in us which is not Christlike.