

How will you cope with the crises of your life?

'If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out....then how will do you in the swelling of Jordan?' (Jeremiah 12:5)

When life tumbles in, what then?

This text asks a very simple but important question; if the everyday events of life overwhelm us, how will we cope with life's crises? The 'swelling of the Jordan' means when the river is full, and fast and furious, with its raging waters bursting over the banks. Who could cross such a river? So, how will we handle life's great storms? When a loved one suddenly and unexpectedly dies? When the longed-for baby is born with some terrible physical or mental malformation? When a medical report tells us we have an incurable condition? What will we do in that awful hour? Where shall we turn? Will our faith be strong enough?

The Rev. Arthur John Gossip (1873-1954) was a Scottish minister and a very popular preacher. He had been a chaplain to Scottish troops in the first World War, a lecturer in pastoral theology at Trinity College in Glasgow and a parish minister. At the height of his power and popularity, his wife suddenly died. Gossip was devastated with grief and sadness. Preaching for the first time after his great loss, he chose the words of this text from Jeremiah 12. He entitled the sermon, 'When life tumbles in, what then?' He later published it with an explanation. 'This sermon has wandered so far over the world, and I have received so pathetically many requests for copies from people in sorrow. I publish it now as it was delivered.'

In the sermon Dr Gossip spoke about the great foundation of faith in the risen Lord Christ. Such a faith does not exempt us from life's crises but it does give us strength and an anchor and hope in the darkest hours. Out of his own recent grief and bereavement the preacher spoke with confidence and deep conviction. Near the end of the sermon he quoted Paul from Romans 8. 'What can separate us from the love of Christ? No, not death!' Then in memorable words Dr Gossip gave his testimony and included words from Pilgrim's Progress. 'Standing in the roaring of the Jordan, cold to the heart with its dreadful chill, and very conscious of the terror of its rushing, I, too, like Hopeful, can call back to you who one day in your turn will have to cross it, "Be of good cheer, my brother, for I feel the bottom, and it is sound."'

What a faith! What confidence! What a glorious certainty! When our faith is anchored in the love and mercy of God revealed in Jesus' death and resurrection, we can face every situation. When the night is dark, when the storm is raging, when all our hopes seem to crash around us – we are kept by the power of God! When life tumbles in, what then? The answer is: The great grace of God outlasts and conquers all our fears, even death itself.

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