

“Gordon, does God hate me?”

Several years ago I received a phone call from someone I had not seen in many years. He mentioned his name and asked if I remembered him. I assured him that I did remember him. I had been his pastor when he was getting started in his adult life.

He then told me that he had been diagnosed with a terminal illness, was given 6-18 months to live, and asked me to visit. I quickly made arrangements to see him.

During the time between that phone call and his death, I made weekly visits to this person's home to counsel with him and to encourage him in the faith. Sometimes we would go out for lunch (he loved Chinese food!) and once I took him for a long drive through Mennonite country near Kitchener.

Each time we met, we considered the detail of our Lord's suffering during the last hours before the cross. I always turned my friend to Isa.53:10 at the end of the session and quoted the words, "He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied."

I assured him that the Saviour thought it was worth all His suffering just for him. In the last few months we looked at the resurrection scenes of our Lord and considered that the mighty power that raised Christ from the dead, operates in the life of every believer.

As we visited together I learned that my friend had suffered dreadful and frightening asth-

matic attacks as a child that were only remedied by the doctor coming and giving him an injection. The time between the onset of the attack and the doctor's arrival were a nightmare for the little fellow.

Adding to the terror of his asthmatic difficulties, he contracted polio and spent time in an iron lung and a wheelchair. When he tried to go to school in the wheelchair, the children at school would pull him from the chair and tease him cruelly.

He had reconstructive surgery for the disease and suffered great pain during the healing process. His formative years had been filled with the horrors of surgeries, pain, separation from his family and long hospital confinements.

One day he told me that for most of his life he lived with the idea that God hated him and that was why all the pain and sorrow had come on him. But as time passed I saw a gradual change in my friend. He became strong in the faith and went from fear and doubting to being confident and enthusiastic.

Sometimes we talked about what happens to the Christian when they die and what heaven is like. Frequently he asked me to review the scene where Lazarus died and the angels came to gather him to Abraham's bosom or the scene in Acts where Stephen experienced the merging of two worlds as he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God as he was dying.

We discussed the appropriateness of Jesus' dying prayer, "Father into Thy hands I commend my spirit.", and that of Stephen, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit."

The last time I saw him was a couple of days before he left us. He was quiet, restful and he spoke little. He was watching a Christian program when I entered the room. He turned the volume down and I spoke briefly of the things we had considered the past three years.

He was content, peaceful and he told me once more how he longed to go to be with Jesus and be free from the suffering and pain. He wanted to look on the One who had suffered so much for him and he wanted to say to the Saviour that he loved Him.

His view of God had gradually been transformed by the study of Christ and the evidence of His great sacrifice for sinners. Now he lives in the presence of the risen Saviour and knows how precious he is to the Friend of sinners.

Did God hate this dear man who had suffered so much? Certainly not!

Now, having considered so often the Saviour's words concerning His suffering being worth it for him, my friend can say to the Saviour, "It was worth all my suffering to see You."

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