



“Turning Misery into Molasses”

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Romans 8:28-29, And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

The Making of Molasses: Pure sugar cane juice (or sugar beets), the sugar cane plant is harvested and stripped of its leaves. Its juice is extracted from the canes, usually by crushing or mashing; it can also be removed by cutting. The juice is boiled to concentrate, which promotes the crystallization of the sugar.

There are three grades of molasses,

- Mild or first molasses The results of this first boiling and removal of sugar crystal is called which has the highest sugar content because comparatively little sugar has been extracted from the source.
- Dark or second molasses is created from a second boiling and sugar extraction, and has a slight *bitter* tinge to its taste.
- Blackstrap or third molasses comes from the third boiling of the sugar syrup. Blackstrap molasses is a sweetener that is actually good for you. Unlike refined white sugar and corn syrup, which are stripped of virtually all nutrients except simple carbohydrates, or artificial sweeteners, blackstrap molasses is a healthful sweetener that contains significant amounts of a variety of minerals including manganese, copper, iron, calcium, potassium, magnesium, Vitamin B6, selenium, and is low calorie.

How does this illustration relate to suffering in the life of a Christian? God is in the process of changing us to adopt the same character responses as Christ when we are in the middle of suffering.

God has a custom made plan to refine each of us. No matter what situation you are in, it is custom made refining process that God is using to conform you to Jesus Christ. Using time, the pressure of life, the cooperation of your will, and the power of the Holy Spirit to make us respond in suffering like Jesus Christ responded. When Jesus was hit, he didn't hit back. When he was spit on, he didn't spit back.

Matthew 6: 27-38, "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you. 32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

The 3 boilings of molasses correspond to the work of suffering that the Holy Spirit uses in our lives to conform us to the attitude to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is refining us to get the hurtful, unbelieving, nasty, sinful selfish, responses out of us so the sweetness and the healthy responses which bring spiritual health and life into our families, our jobs, and church community. We always think we are doing pretty good until the Holy Spirit allows a series of events that turns up the heat and to bring pressure to bear so that we will surrender and re-surrender our lives to let the really good stuff of Jesus come out so we can become healed more and more and become an agent of healing.

The true measure of our maturity as Christians is how we react and respond when we are treated unfairly. If we hurt back, gossip, rebel, reject, withdraw...etc., we aren't conformed to the character of Christ yet. We need another boiling to bring out the sweetness of Jesus Christ. When Jesus was cut up, mashed, and ground up by injustice, betrayal, unfairness, lies, and torture, sweetness of the truth and character of God came out of him.

Three grades of our Christian response to suffering:

- First suffering response: we initially respond more or less graciously to unfairness because we know we should as Christians.
- Second hardship/suffering response: we know what the right response is but it also exposes the bitterness we feel toward God and others for what we have suffered.
- Third hardship/suffering response: brings out the true brokenness, surrender to Jesus Christ, to give ourselves to his righteous responses which bring life.

Story of Job:

- The first molasses: Job 1: 20-22, At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. Job 2:9-10, His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? *Curse God and die!*" He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.
- The second molasses: Job 3: 3:1, After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. Job 9: 21-23, "Although I am blameless, I have no concern for myself; I despise my own life. It is all the same; that is why I say, 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.' When a scourge brings sudden death, he mocks the despair of the innocent.
- The third molasses: Job 42: 42:1-6, Then Job replied to the LORD: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Job refused the demonic counsel to, "curse God and die." It appeals to our human nature but is anti God. The sweetness of a life refined by suffering and refusing to give in to the pain of offenses, unfair treatment, and physical suffering *brings God great delight!* (Ps. 147:11)

A third molasses response in Heb. 10: 32-39, Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. (Also)

Don't fear or resent the refining work that God is doing in EVERYONE of us. Hebrews 12:5-16 tells us that it is a sign of his love and acceptance of us! God is not done until the day we die.