

PATIENCE AND ITS WORK

A “*PATIENT continuance in well-doing*” is well-pleasing to God, and will secure the blessing at last, even life for evermore (Rom. 2:7). But like all courses that lead to good results, it is a course that is difficult, and implies something to endure. There was no need for patience if all were sweet and refreshing; but there **is** need for patience, as all can testify who have laid hold of the hope set before us in the gospel. All is not sweet and refreshing, but much, and almost everything, the other way. We are in a dry and thirsty land, wherein there is but an occasional streamlet (and that almost dry in its bed) to strengthen the weary traveller by the way. It is written,

“It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.”

Doubtless it is good, but still trying, and perhaps good because trying. Our faith and patience are exercised in the attitude of waiting, and exercise of this kind gives spiritual strength and hardihood.

“Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope” (Rom. 5:4).

“We are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope . . . but if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it” (Rom. 8:24).

We “wait for the Son of God from heaven” (1 Thes. 1:10).

We are “*looking for that blessed hope*” (Titus 2:13) and our looking and waiting and hoping prepare us for taking part in the joy of those who are to say in that day,

“Lo, this is our God: we have waited for him . . . we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isa. 25:9).

It is well to recognise this feature of our calling that we “*be not weary in well doing.*” True it is that “*hope deferred maketh the heart sick*”; but if we recognise the fact that a certain deferring of hope is part of our trial appointed of God, we shall be enabled to “*endure as seeing him who is invisible.*” If we look back, we shall see that the same affliction was accomplished in all of whom God’s approval is recorded. In no case is it more strikingly exemplified than in the case of the man who is called “*the friend of God,*” and who occupies the honourable position of father of the family whom God is begetting for Himself from among the sons of men. Abraham was called to leave the land of his nativity, and go to a country of which he was ignorant, with apparently no practical object. Obeying the command, he came to the land of Canaan, and sojourned among the children of the land as a stranger. His sojourn was long and trying. He was promised the land for inheritance, jointly with his seed, but had no information as to the time to which the promise referred, nor any indication for many years that he was to have seed. To the people of the land he must have appeared mad—a harmless neighbour enough, but indulging in the strange and unlikely fancy, that one day the whole country would be his, and that he would possess it jointly with a family as the stars of the sky for multitude. Abraham had a hundred years of this trial of patient waiting, and was then gathered to his fathers, “*not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off*” (Heb. 11:13) He must have had a dreary time of it, as all the people of God have had since his day. He had none of the historic landmarks which we possess, by which we are enabled to see a great part of the divine programme accomplished, and almost to feel the motion of the machinery which is hurrying on to the appointed consummation. True, he had the advantage of personal intercourse, at intervals, with the Elohim, which would no doubt make up for a good deal. Still, it did not take the weariness from delay. In one sense, it would aggravate it, since the visible reality of the promise and the

personages who had to do with the communication of it, would be apt to inspire him with the desire for immediate realisation, and corresponding impatience with unexplained delay.

Isaac and Jacob, *“the heirs with him of the same promise,”* were similarly tried and similarly endured till they *“fell on sleep and saw corruption.”* Joseph was put sorely to the proof before he saw the light. He had but little inducement as a slave to keep God in his remembrance, and make His will the law of his life. Yet was he steadfast for dark years of adversity, and, at last, sat on the throne as the light of his Father’s house. David is an illustration of the same thing. He was anointed to be king of Israel without intimation that he would first be an outcast, whose life would be hunted with the whole power of the kingdom. The bitterness came upon him unexpectedly and made him despondent. Said he, *“I will one day perish by the hand of Saul.”* They must have been dreary times for David when hiding in the dens and caves of the earth, afraid to show himself to civilised man for fear of his life. The keenness of his mental sufferings is reflected in many of the psalms written during that time, which, though prophetic of the Messiah, were, primarily, the breathings of the afflicted spirit of David, of whom the Spirit made use to foreshadow the experience of his greater Son—the Root and offspring of David—who, before exaltation, was to be a *“man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”* This at once leads us to Jesus, the greatest example of suffering affliction, and patience. In all things he was tempted like to his brethren, yet without sin. He illustrates to us, as no case does, that God appoints dreary times for His people to pass through, before He lifts upon them the unveiled light of His countenance.

Behold him! Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow? He came to his own people with heart full of the pity of God who was enshrined in him. He looked on them with tears in his eyes, and bewailed the infatuation that resisted all divine entreaty. He sought to bless and do them good, in turning every one of them from their iniquities. But they hid their faces from him. They despised and rejected him. They gave him to insult and death. They esteemed him smitten of God and afflicted, little knowing that he was wounded for their transgressions, that he was bruised for their iniquity. The burden was too grievous to be borne. It broke the heart and whelmed the sufferer in death. Ah, thou Man of Sorrows, whose cry of agony rings down to this dark century of sin, and opens anew the fountain of thy grief in the hearts of such as love thee, thou shalt yet see of the travail of thy soul and shalt be satisfied! A seed shall arise from the dust of the earth, who shall praise thy glorious name, when, surrounding thee in the day of thine exaltation, they shall sing,

“Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb . . . Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

Even now is the Lord exalted with a name above every name. But the glory was purchased with suffering—not merely the death on the cross, but the dreariness of his sojourn among men, who were indifferent, hardhearted, and rebellious. Even his disciples, with all their loyalty, were children in understanding, and no companions to him who dwelt in the bosom of the Father. Let us look, then, unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God; and we shall be greatly nerved to an endurance of the little dreariness incident to our profession.

Then, take Paul, who expressly says that he obtained mercy—

“That in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (1 Tim. 1:16).

He had forty years of no ordinary conflict. In labours more abundant than the rest of the apostles, he had a greater share of the privations in those times incident to the preaching of the word. In travels more extended and perilous, he was in prisons more frequent, in stripes oft, in social degradation more complete. He was counted a low character—a pestilent fellow with both Jew and Gentile—the offscouring of all things, having lost reputation, social standing, and wealth. The recital may read picturesquely. It may please the fancy to contemplate so heroic a sacrifice, but the experience itself was bitter to Paul. He did not endure his troubles so easily as we read about them, or as the fancy may paint. He was a perishing mortal like ourselves, and his weak nature often sank under the rigour of his course. He speaks of being “*pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that he despaired even of life*” (2 Cor. 1:8); and of being “*in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*” Such expressions show the stern reality of the experience through which he had to struggle in his pilgrimage to life eternal. They show that those words of his, already quoted, are no vain words, wherein he says that in him, by Christ, was set forth a pattern of long-suffering for the benefit of subsequent believers. His warfare was arduous, his sufferings keen; his endurance great; his patience wonderful. These features of his case are commended to our consideration. They are intended by Christ for our profit; and profitable they are, if we let our mind rest on them.

It is some comfort in our troubled experience, to think that those who have gone before had their turn, and a sharp turn too. We cannot suffer more than they did. Few of us will ever be put to so great a strait; and if they could say “*Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,*” where is our courage if we faint by the way? Our sufferings, though lighter, need not be less serviceable. They may always tend to the same result of fixing the desire and hope on the things that are not seen; for “*the things which are seen,*” even in their most prosperous form, “*are temporal*”; but the things that are not seen (as yet) “*are eternal.*” Therefore “*though the outward man perish,*” which he will do, work or wait, “*our inward man*”—(the new mental man created within by the truth)—“*is renewed day by day.*” Our brethren in the first century fortified themselves by the reflection that—

“*The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*”

Shall we look at them with a different eye who are seeking to follow in their footsteps? God permits suffering to His chosen for this very purpose,

“*That the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Christ*” (1 Pet. 1:7).

He puts His children in the furnace to try them, as gold, that the dross may be consumed. No character is complete till it is tried.

A man or a woman is worth little as a companion, either for wisdom or sympathy, who has not seen trouble. Those believers, “*living in pleasure, are dead while they live.*” Having a name to live, they are dead; they are not awake to the great and dread realities of existence that are in God. If God love, he will draw them into the furnace in some way. This is the word of Christ to the seven ecclesias.

“*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten*” (Rev. 3:19).

Again, “*Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then ye are bastards, and not sons*” (Heb. 12:6-8).

It cannot be that this principle should apply to the sons of God in the first century, and not apply now. God changeth not; and if we are His, we are as much the objects of His care as His children were in the beginning. Therefore when we suffer according to the will of God, let us commit ourselves unto Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4:19). We have Paul's assurance that He will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear, but will with the temptation make a way of escape.

The dullness of the time, the weariness of delay, the triumph of ungodliness, the uprise of affliction in our affairs, we may accept as the angels of Him who, through much tribulation, is purifying to himself a people who, with prepared and chastened hearts, will in the day of His glory *"come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."* Only let us give diligent heed to the things we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip; lest any man fail of the grace of God, and come short of the promise which has been left for those who believe and are faithful to the end. As newborn babes, let us desire the sincere milk of the word (in the daily reading thereof) that we may grow thereby; continuing instant in prayer, and making melody in our hearts to the lord, in the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; redeeming the time, knowing that the days are evil; *"being steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord."*

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