

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE TRIAL OF FAITH.

A Sermon

PREACHED BY

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[THIS SERMON WAS NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.]

“ Though now for a season if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.”
1 Peter i. 6.

WHEN the love of God is shed abroad in the heart—when heaven’s sunlight illumines the understanding—when peace reigns in the conscience—the body well in health—circumstances somewhat straight, or if not straight the crook not felt—enemies at a distance, or silent, and we comforted on every side, how pleasant then is existence, how lightsome the mind, how pleasant the aspect of all things, all things seem praising the Lord, while we each can say, “ Bless the Lord, O my soul!” We then wonder how people can complain of life, or have any wish to depart even to a better world, or why they call this world a “ waste howling wilderness,” or why they so sigh and mourn, are so cast down, and are so gloomy, while we become quite eloquent in heaping words against them, and we tell them to “ arise and shine!”—to rise and fly up to the regions where the mourners cease to weep. But just let the tide turn with us, and drive us among rocks and shallows, or to where two seas meet, and let our ship be wrecked, and broken to pieces, and we driven out upon the pitiless deep, let waves and billows go over us, and let us be cast upon some strange island, and let some strange viper fasten upon our hand, in a word, let afflictions abound in body, soul, or circumstances, with no apparent hope of a speedy turn of our captivity, then we begin to think, O what a world that must be where there is no pain, all is well, all is health, ease, happiness, joyfulness, rest, satisfaction, a cup without one bitter therein, repose in love eternal,—Ah, Lord, loose me from this prison of my clay, and let me enter into rest! What! ah, what must it be, to have in possession entire and eternal freedom? O Lamb of God, thy precious blood can do it all! The perfection of his atonement is the culminating point to saints on earth and saints in heaven; by him it is that our God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces! Ah, now we are brought down we can weep with them that weep, and would be gladdened by the four-fold testimony of our text, that this

heaviness is but for a season; that there is a needs be—that is through the temptations, that is tribulations to which we are appointed, that some great end and purpose is to be thereby answered; thus then, first, *this heaviness is but for a season*; secondly, *that there is a needs be*; and thirdly, *that a good end is hereby to be attained*.

I. THIS HEAVINESS IS BUT FOR A SEASON. But what is this heaviness? This will depend upon the *cause* of the heaviness; manifold are the temptations, the tribulations we must go through to enter the kingdom of heaven. Some of these tribulations are common, and some are not common. The common are afflictions of body; we cannot shew too much sympathy to those who in this respect pass their years in sorrow; to the afflicted pity should be shewn; and unhappily it is so with us, that as with many other things, so with health, we never so much value it as when it is taken from us. Family troubles are often a cause of much heaviness: Adam, Noah, Jacob, and David, had family troubles such as very few of the people of God in our day have. Let us not think that these men of God passed through the world without having their troubles as well as their mercies. The cares also of the world deaden the mind to eternal things. We are as creatures, and especially as fallen creatures, one with the world; it was originally our divinely allotted home, but sin has ruined this our earthly home, it is, alas, turned into a field of battle, of plagues, and of death, and “all flesh is but as grass,” it flourisheth for a little while and it is gone.” So that every one is born unto trouble: as a flower of the field, he makes but a transient appearance, it is soon cut down, and the place thereof shall know it no more. When then affliction sets in, and the things of time cease to yield their wonted comforts, we are in heaviness. Such trouble is more or less common to all men. But there are troubles common only to Christian men; such as when darkness envelopes the mind; when there is no open vision; when our sins look us in the face, and ask us what we intend to do with them, and that it is delusion on our part to suppose the Lord will pardon them, that the Saviour has atoned for them, that a righteous God will pass by them; and not only so, but when no part of the word of truth seems to say a cheering word to us, but rather the reverse, while our hearts are full of infidelity, unbelief, and rebellion; then are we in heaviness—our eyes are heavy, our hands hang down, our hearts are heavy, we drag along, with the gloomy notes that when 'tis morning would to God 't were evening, and when 'tis evening would to God 't were morning; yet there is hope, for this heaviness endureth but for a night, for joy cometh in the morning. It is but for a season; but how is this, that this heaviness is but for a season? Wherein lies the secret of this? Has eternal election anything to do with turning our captivity, taking away our heaviness, and making us lightsome and happy? Yes! verily election hath something to do with taking away this heaviness; and so it is written, that “for the elects' sake, whom he hath chosen, the days of affliction are shortened;” for true disciples must and shall rejoice that their names are written in heaven: “Elect according to

the foreknowledge of God the Father" is a truth wherein they shall rejoice. "He will avenge his own elect which cry to him day and night;" and this election in Christ Jesus to eternal salvation being entirely of grace, can never like the national election of the Jews, come to naught; this could be borne out in its advantages only by the objects of choice fulfilling the condition laid upon them; but the election in Christ Jesus is as absolute in its ultimate end, and in all the intermediate parts thereof, as it is in its origin; the Saviour bears the great mission of this choice, which is to give *eternal* life to as many as were given him. And in such electing grace as this shall all the saved greatly rejoice: and so it is that our heaviness can be but for a season, for grace will, shall, can and must reign. Another reason (or rather combination of reasons) that this heaviness can be but for a season, is the power of the eternal Spirit,—he is the sanctifier, and brings us sweetly into the obedience of faith; and in order to keep us there, blesses us with the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ; and so when the Holy Spirit again renews his work of sanctification, again enables us to believe in God's election of us, and again renews our confidence in the infinite worth and power of eternal redemption, then our heaviness departs, our powers are renewed, we can again actively obey; we are sprinkled with atoning blood, and have access unto the Father, who has dealt with us in his abundant mercy, has given us a lively hope wherein we greatly rejoice, and that in the prospect and assurance, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, of the heritage where *all* the lines will fall to us in pleasant places; none of those places being earthly, corruptible, perishable, or loseable, "wherein we greatly rejoice." Take away electing, sanctifying grace; take away the Saviour; take away the Father's abundant mercy; take away the resurrection of Christ; take away the eternity of God; take away the fulness of that grace which is to meet us at heaven's threshold, and supply all that may then be lacking; do all this; then, and not till then, our heaviness may be; yea, must be for ever. See then here the interposition of the eternal Three: here is God the Father choosing and bringing us according to his abundant mercy, with a lively hope; here is the Holy Spirit sanctifying, bringing to obedience, and speaking peace by the blood of the Lamb; and here is the Saviour, in his resurrection glory; and shall I say, the united power of God to keep unto final salvation all who love him. Let us then remember, that infinitely worse troubles than those I have spoken of, and of eternal duration, might have been our portion; and if through grace we have escaped the wrath to come, there is no other trouble comparatively speaking worth the name of a trouble. But though our affliction be but temporary, yet while we are under the cloud, we often fail to get any comfort; anguish of spirit is anguish of spirit, and all the time the shoe continues to pinch, the thorn to pierce, and affliction to abound, we sigh, we mourn, and look every way for escape; but refuge faileth us, and we seem pining away in our trouble. But, saith the Lord, "I know the thoughts I think towards you, thoughts of peace and not of evil to give you an expected end."

II. THERE IS A NEEDS BE. Whether we can see this needs be or not, he who sees all things sees a needs be, why Job should be afflicted as he was. We perhaps can but partially see, but if we cannot understand much of the *positive* as it pertains to present circumstances, we can see a little something advantageous in the *negative*, that these afflictions are not because of any deficiency in the atonement of Calvary; no, for his own arm accomplished the warfare, and finished the work; these troubles, therefore, cannot be retributive, nor wrathful, nor retaliative, nor any part of penal punishment for sin; nor is it from want of love in God; nor from any want of faithfulness to his holy promise; nor any want of stability in his covenant; nor any contradiction to his sacred oath, wherein he hath said, "I will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee;" nor from any want of patience, forbearance, or long-suffering towards us; nor from any wish to make us unhappy or grieve us; nor from any thought of ever parting with us; nor from any repentance of his gracious choice of us; nor from any dishonour to his dear Son, as though he had not suffered enough without inflicting wrath upon us also; nor to get rid of us; nor to set us finding fault with one another; nor to make us repent that we ever came to live with him; nor to make us think meanly of him; nor to indicate that when we get home he will not receive us very graciously; nor to suggest to us that his purposes are not the same concerning us that they ever were; nor to hinder us from getting on as well as he always meant we should do; nor because he has any delight in seeing us in trouble; nor because his wisdom and skill fail him, and he knows not how to deal with us, except in this rough way; nor because he hath not mercy enough at command to treat us otherwise; nor because his compassions fail; nor because he does not look at us perfect in Christ; nor because the Holy Spirit does not carry on his work according to the goodwill of the Father; nor because he did not think of all those things beforehand; nor because he means his children to live in slavish fear of him; nor because he gives them anything grudgingly; nor because he is not always the same.

Still for all our afflictions, there is a needs be; yet, when these afflictions are such as to keep us from the house of God, and seem to take from us all heart to pray, to make us feel more—ten times more concerned how to get out of the furnace than anything else. Faith weak; hope low; the Lord silent; no open vision; no coming forth unto the temple of God; no shinings of his presence; a darkness over the mind that not only might be felt, but is felt. It is night, dark solitary night, and all the beasts of the forest creep forth, and waters roll in from all quarters; surely the enemy knows when we are thus brought low, and stirs up in every shape and form all he can against us, and that at a time when we seem least able to bear it. So it has very naturally ever been the policy of the enemy to come upon us when we are weak-handed. Thus did Pharaoh treat the Israelites, Saul David, Nebuchadnezzar the three worthies, heathen rulers Daniel, the Jews the Saviour and his Apostles, and Popery the saints of the Most High; yet, the weakness of these, was only in appearance and in outward circumstances,

for with them was the strength of the mighty God of Jacob. And as the word now declareth, so in the end it will prove there was a needs be.

Now, as the positives of this needs be in relation to present circumstances, there are several hints given; first, to stain the pride of the glory of all flesh that no flesh should glory in his presence. Troubles which make us like Job, "curse the day wherein we were born," or that make us exclaim with Elijah, "Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my (runaway) fathers;" or with Jonah, "it is good for me to be angry, even unto death;" or with Jeremiah, "he hath hedged up my way as with hewn stones," hewn and fit so well together as to shut out every ray of light. And he hath made my way so crooked, that I cannot see to any distance what is before me, whether the next turn to the right or to the left will be for the best or for the worse, whether I am yet arrived at the worst, and whether even has a bear or a lion, he will not tear me in pieces. Ah! happy world, who have nought of this wormwood—this gall. I envy them all. What! are we such poor creatures as this, to kick at the rod instead of kissing it? What then, must be our conclusion, but that we are vile and may well abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes? Did Jesus set us an example to murmur, to rebel, to repine and declare, "all these things are against us?" No; he did not. What then shall we say to these things but this, that if he were merely our example, no flesh or spirit either could be saved, but he is our substitute, and these wilderness experiences, if we let them have their perfect work, lay us low in the dust of self-abasement before God. These thorns make way for the all-sufficiency of his grace, and shew most clearly our need of the surety of the new covenant as a hiding-place from the storm; as a way of supply and as a resting place, he alone can give us rest. All these troubles shall swell the song, and give eternal intensity to the anthem of "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his blood and made us kings and priests to God we shall reign for ever." And so it is that Jonah shall come out of the whale's belly; the three from the fiery furnace; and Daniel from the lions' den, better men than when they were cast into those places; better men because better acquainted with a faithful covenant-keeping God.

The preached word throws a little light upon these trials; but it is by the trials themselves that we get the substance of our lessons. The one tries us to the uttermost, the other shews somewhat of the meaning thereof. And so without this chastisement, this correction, this discipline, we should not be wounded, weary, hungry, thirsty, poor or needy, earnest, or substantial in our profession, but should be airy, speculative, heavy, high-minded, and as silly doves without a heart, and without the word of truth there would be no healing, no rest, no food, no living waters, no giving to the poor, no supplying the needy. No plea in prayer, no substance to inherit. Thus then, one present end answered by these tribulations is to spoil us in the flesh that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, and hereby conforming us to the order of electing sanctifying and saving

grace, and thus he heaps as it were coals of fire upon our heads, until he has softened down our iron neck and brazen brow; and that when he has softened us he lays us on the anvil and beats us into that shape which seemeth him best; then in that shape he lets us cool down. We are formed for our place in the truth and in the church, and so when he wants a little further alteration he will put us into the furnace again, and again soften us by fiery trials and then bring us forth again, and thus will he fit us for our lot here, as well as for our ultimate home. Another present object of these trials this heaviness which is but for a season, is that we might be partakers of his holiness. Christ Jesus being the end of sin is our sanctification, so to have an increased possession of his holiness, to be an increased partaker of Christ, and the more we are sprinkled with his blood, the more his name is unto us as ointment poured forth; the more we decrease and the more he increases the sweeter savour we are (not unto men, but) unto God, "this is my beloved Son," saith the Father, "hear ye him." Let his word sanctify you, ye shall be clean through the word that he shall speak unto you; he, by his word will cleanse the leper and heal all manner of sickness. And thus through the words which are spirit and life we become partakers of his holiness, fiery trials, heaviness in the heart which maketh it stoop. This it is, that openeth our ears to the truth, and makes us glad with that which otherwise we should blindly turn from: times of renewed sanctification are times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Thus our victory over sin and Satan, and death and hell, is by the blood of the Lamb.

But after all, while we would not for one moment lessen the importance of present advantages, or the present good the Lord is pleased in mercy to bring about by this heaviness through manifold temptations, seeing even now, it afterwards yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby, yet the last end is the chief object to be looked at, it is to give us an expected end, an end which the purest gold cannot bring about; faith therefore, in the trial of it, is more precious than gold, which perisheth, though it be tried with fire. Gold—pure gold is of great use in this world, yet a pure faith infinitely surpasseth gold. Faith tried and proved to be genuine, to be pure, abiding by the healing, purifying truth of God. This faith will be found as gold, even as much fine gold cannot be found. Can the possession of fine gold be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ? Men may boast themselves of the multitude of their riches, but it will be the work of pure faith, and that only that can make us approved, raise us to honour, and crown us with glory. But why must it be of faith? The answer is very simple, that apart from the eternal perfection of Christ, we stand on all sides and every shape and form condemned. There is no justification before God out of Christ; and there is no way of personal oneness with Christ, but by faith, ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. So the work of faith is to receive the testimony of pardon, redemption, salvation, and every needed mercy, and to look to God for the realization of these things;

a false faith does not receive the truth of the testimony of what Christ is really, or if it do receive the doctrines of truth, it is only in theory; there is no real heart in it; like Balaam they bless with their mouths, but curse with their hearts. But pure faith, that faith which is the gift of God, and the work of God, that faith is rooted in the heart, with the heart such believeth, and they are solemnly, sacredly, and truly one with the truth as it is in Jesus; they have no room for error, truth sufficeth them; "it compasseth them on every side, is their shield and buckler, and they rejoice not in iniquity, but in the truth; the truth maketh them free, even as their blest surety is free." This is the faith that shall be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, and first unto praise, such have profited by the talents of truth delivered unto them; they have with these talents traded with heaven; they have gained by them many consolations; many revivings, many deliverances, and help times out of number; this has made them search the scriptures, and hear the word yet more, and so their acquaintance with the truth is increased, their coast is enlarged, the hand of the Lord is with them, they are blest indeed, and shall not see evil any more in the second Adam, as they have seen it in the first Adam. Being thus kept in the truth, they are kept from evil, and so they abide in Christ, and the wicked one toucheth them not; these can give a good account of the talents of truth. These talents were given to them graciously, but the one talent of truth given to the slothful servant was given providentially. Many a man is raised up providentially, who is not raised up graciously: such pervert or lay aside the talent of truth delivered providentially unto them, they think the doctrine of sovereign grace somewhat dangerous to trade with, and so they hide the truth, neither trade with it themselves, nor let us, if they can help it, trade with the same; they are more for a little law and duty-faith work, and yet boast of having taken care of the truth. Yes; the same kind of care that Satan would take of the saints; he would put them into prison and never let them see the light of day, but he who has profited by the truth, he can say, "Lord, thy talents have gained me more talents," then, "well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." If we thus have the praise of God, we may verily well hear with the dispraise of men, but the faith of such is found not only unto praise, but also unto honour; such began to build, they were taught to count the cost, and were prepared to part with all, yea, with life itself, if need be, for the truth sake. Such an one holds out unto the end; he has a price in his hands by which he can finish his tower. Do you ask what that price is? The answer is, that it is the mercy of the Lord. And will not the believer here find a sufficiency with which to build his tower of safety and defence? Shall not mercy be built up for ever? No wood, hay or stubble here, but "according to his mercy hath he saved us." Doth mercy, can mercy ever fail? Does not the hand of faith hold the testimony of mercy? and doth not the prayer of faith call for mercy as it is

needed; and shall not the finishing thereof be with shoutings of grace and grace unto it? And shall the gates of hell against such faith prevail? Shall men begin to mock and to say, This man began to build, and was not able to finish? In many things the Christian may peradventure be put to shame for a season, but never in his fixedness and completeness in Christ,— here he comes off with honour, even the honour of final success; and this honour have all his saints, that hereby they should praise the name of the Lord. Thus shall their faith in the end be found unto praise and honour; and also unto glory; and how shall his faith be found unto glory? It shall be found unto glory first, by the victory it shall achieve, and by the possessions it shall acquire. Such will ask, Am I able with ten-thousand to meet him that cometh against me with twenty-thousand? Yes, boldly saith such an one; for “all things are possible to him that believeth.” The Lord of hosts shall be my ten-thousand! I will go in the strength of the Lord! “I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.” And shall I ever have to send an ambassage to the enemy, and desire conditions of peace with him? Yes, if I went in my own name and righteousness I might; but the name of the Lord must fell Goliah; the righteousness of the Lord shall cut the spear asunder, shall break the battle-bow, and burn the enemy’s war-chariot in the fire. Thus must the believer forsake all that he hath of his own, and he and his weapons of warfare shall be mighty through God; so victory shall be final! the inheritance shall be obtained! the kingdom possessed! the glory realized, and shall endure for ever! See then the goodness of our God, causing “these light afflictions which are but for a moment, to work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Let us then not faint, seeing our heaviness is but for a season, and that there is a needs be, and we shall rest and stand in our lot at the end of the days; and when all the springs of mortality are dried up, then shall break forth in perfection, in eternal flow, the springs we have in God! He will be our exceeding joy, if we continue in the faith, rooted and grounded, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel; and if our faith be the truth-loving faith it can never fail; the end thereof must be the salvation of our souls. Amen.

Now ready.

SELECTIONS FROM THE SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT, FOR 1859.

Twelve Sermons by Mr. JAMES WELLS. Price six-pence. Sent free for seven stamps. J. Cox, 100, Borough Road.

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